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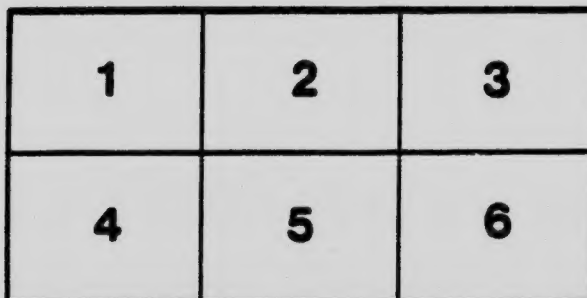
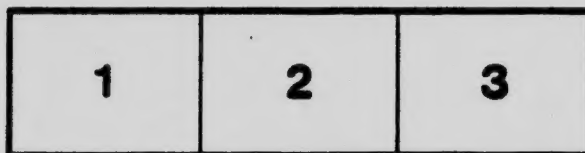
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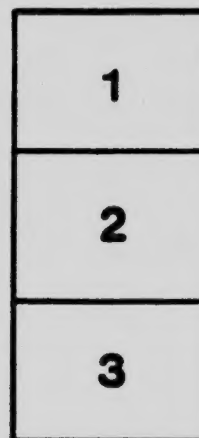
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BATTLE ROYAL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A BENEDICT'S ESCAPADE

BATTLE ROYAL

A Western Drama in an Eastern Land

BY W. DE VEER



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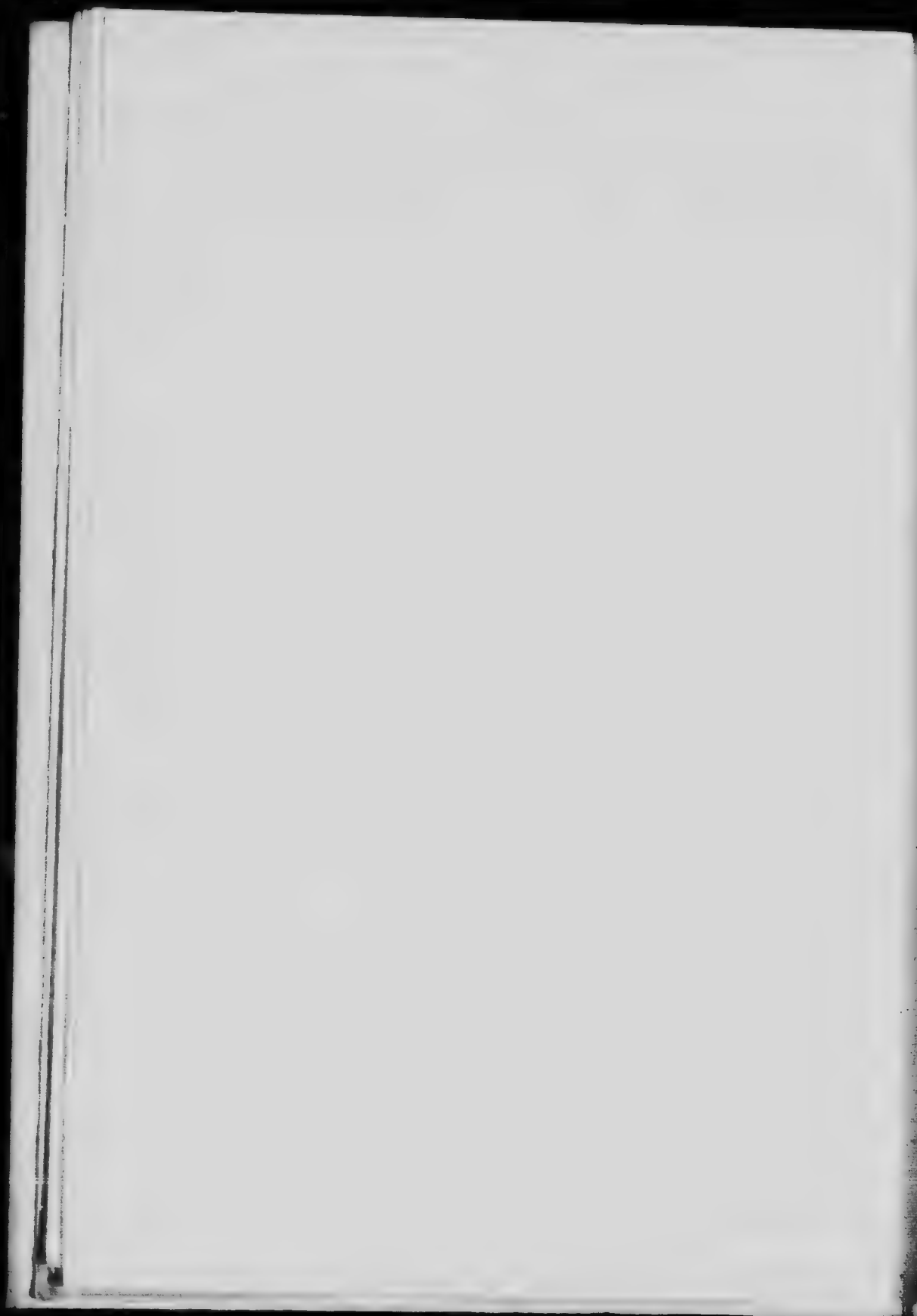
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TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER
THE DUTCH AUTHOR
H. DE VEER
(1829-1890)



BATTLE ROYAL



BATTLE ROYAL

CHAPTER I

IT is just before sunrise.

On the blue silk couch of the Pacific the tiny town of Macassar is sunk in deep repose.

The scene, a harbour vaguely reminiscent of far-off Holland, is veiled in misty clouds, and only dimly illumined by the phosphorescent sea and the first faint glimpses of coming dawn.

Slowly the light appears as if half-hearted and unwilling ; as though the sun has grown weary of his recurring task of putting straight the disorder made and left behind by Night.

The white, grey, and yellow gables along the silent quay, which in the full glow of day abound in colour, look shabby and spectre-like in the cold gloom of earliest morn. Three big steamers lie moored to the pier—protruding masses of angular profiles and indistinct bodies overshadowing the native craft that is there, but lies wrapped in the mystery of the deep water.

Of the three, only one is up and doing—the *Boni* of the Royal Packet Line. She makes a brave show with her electric rays, in pale silver, streaming through the portholes. Her steam-winch at regular intervals sends up outbursts of frantic passion ; wide awake,

and swallowing as they are swung to her the chests and bales that lie in quickly diminishing heaps at her side, she is the only source of sound and brightness in the somnolent world around. The heavy, luminous smoke rising from her funnel proclaims an early departure.

A short quarter of an hour—and the scene has completely changed.

Over the whole line darkness is in full retreat. The eastern sky is now a golden shield, radiating a soft, pale glow that invades and at the same time reveals the immense cupola of Heaven. Though the sun has not yet left his couch, he is on the point of rising. He is announced. A rush of dawn—not full day, but its immediate forerunner—speeds through the dreaming landscape, its course marked by tones, lines and values gently stirred, though still heavy with sleep.

Now it is possible to distinguish the hills that skirt the town in the distance, offshoots of the Lompobatang, the gigantic volcano sixty miles away—while the space between, padded with downy, nebulous matter, begins to be accentuated by the touch of the torch-bearer and awakens to reality, reassuming the shape and character lost during the hours of rest. Groves and houses, trees and hill-tops find themselves in their places and, endowed with an air of novelty, seem to smile at one another—the old illusion that never fails in its effect.

The internal glow suddenly fades in the little lighthouse in the foreground. Only an outward life is left to it, making it look queerly out of place and dull.

Far away to the west one or two islets of the Spermonde Archipelago have just emerged from the grey chaos and re-entered the sphere of tangible things. They do not yet look what they are—a scattering of magnificent jewels set in the ever-changing wonder of the waves ; but they are briskly engaged in their daily burnishing and will be ready in time.

Ten minutes more, and lo ! here is the sun.

As he peeps over the edge of the horizon his eager glances flash across the water that breaks in silent rollers against the woodwork along the shore ; over the marches covered with rizophores and wokka palms, and the rivulets full of alligators, that intersect the sandy beach half a mile farther on.

The native vessels in the harbour have now become visible. Here, where the furious beating of a drum—to chase away evil spirits—suggests a voyage of some importance, a single sail resting on a short, double mast is hoisted ; there, the small primitive craft indulges in the leisure that logically follows a lengthy period of exertion. Of their decks and poops covered with matting—which barely conceals the rough cargo lying bare and exposed—of their quaint cabins and coarse rigging, every detail is seen. Emphasised, too, are the feathery crowns of the tamarind trees that, in a double row, lead from the harbour into the town. The flag drooping from the post on the Governor's dwelling—itself invisible—hangs aloft, a tiny patch of brilliant colour, like some miraculous flower.

Meanwhile the lurking shadow behind every prominence deepens. The ravines among the hills, the recesses beneath cocoanut and mango trees, the dark interiors

of native houses, the doors and windows in stone walls and gables, accentuate in one deep note the advancing glare that will scorch and shrivel where it can.

Another long, hot day has opened.

It found Anton van Weghe all prepared to start home, after a full decade's sojourn in the East. At length he had reached the end of his first term as a functionary in the Dutch Colonial Civil Service, in which he held the rank of *Controleur* (local magistrate and administrator). A year's leave lay before him, to be enjoyed in perfect freedom, exempt from all official ties and duties, in his own native land. He stood on the threshold of a new life, of an interlude in his career, of a world of fresh impressions. For Anton this 7th of March was indeed a red-letter day!

He was up betimes, and after drinking his coffee went to the bathroom, where he doused away the effects of the previous night's roaring send-off that some Macassar friends had given him in "Soranus," the bowling club. On his way back he met his host and old chum Beekveldt, in the passage connecting the house with the outside quarters.

"Hullo, how are you?" Anton cheerfully exclaimed; and, regardless of sponge and towel, playfully clasping his powerful arms round the other man's waist, he forcibly dragged the reluctant partner into a waltz.

"Stop, you idiot!" cried the victim of the ridiculous caper, half annoyed, half amused. Freeing himself, after a few unwilling rounds upon the cemented floor, he added, as soon as he had regained his breath: "You'd better hurry up and finish dressing. It's a

quarter to seven—the boat won't wait, even for you. If you miss it, you'll miss the *Juliana* * in Batavia as well. Think of all the people at the pier to see you off! Even the Governor will be there—so hurry up, I say!"

Anton looked with mischievous eyes at the fat little man in fluttering pyjamas who stood panting before him. As a parting shot, he gave him a hearty clap on the shoulder.

"No fear, old chap! Oceans of time. I shall be ready by seven, I promise you. I have tubbed, and shaved, so have only to get into my clothes. By the way, I hope Simin will give us something tasty for breakfast. I don't know how *you* feel, but anchovy, or pickled herrings, would be the thing for me."

"Leave that to him," came the prompt reply. "He is sure to rise to the occasion. He knows his business, does Simin!"

"And his master's little ways!"

This remark Beekveldt chose to ignore, though he was exceedingly susceptible on the point in question.

"I have told him," he said with dignity, "that it is *Tuan† Controleur's* last meal here. You will see the result. Simin is a man of parts. I have never known him fail."

"Oh, he is a marvel, we all know. He is hard to beat. I shall sing his praises wherever I go," said Anton lightly.

The recognition of Simin's unique qualities as *jongos* (boy) greatly pleased the hearer. He beamed with delight as Anton hurried away. Had he not

* The big mail-steamer to Holland.

† "Sahib" in British India.

grown this precious fruit himself? Was not its perfection the result of his own sacrifice and endeavour?

Naïvely selfish, a bachelor and an epicurist, Beekveldt had carefully chosen and systematically trained his native boy for the delicate, responsible task of serving him. He was dead against half measures; he hated inefficiency and "lack of style"; everything in his house must run smoothly, without any hitch, any noise, any notion of trouble or conflict, be spotlessly clean as in Holland. Transplanted to the East, where there is little room for homeliness, domestic comfort, or finish, these characteristics were somewhat of an anomaly. The tropics like to do things by halves, sketchily, or—not at all. They move on broad lines, ignoring detail.

No trouble had been too great for Beekveldt to ensure that some day his servant should fulfil his minutest demand, anticipate his every wish, without having to be told. He offered his own precious person for analysis, so that by studying him closely his man might learn intimately to know not only his habits but his unavowable needs, as the ideal tailor studies his patron, and the ideal doctor his patient. The apprentice, proving himself worthy of these educational advantages, had profited even further than had ever been intended: while outwardly setting an example to other men's "boys," he took care to flourish on his creator's foibles. And his position was secure, for gradually Beekveldt had become convinced that life would be a source of endless worry and vexation should Simin cease to attend on him and smooth his daily path.

Half an hour later Beekveldt and van Weghe—both in white duck, adorned in Anton's case with gilt buttons bearing a crowned W—met at a breakfast of quite unusual proportions, even for the East, where variety has to make up for quality, and abundance of what you can get for the absence of things desired, but not obtainable.

A veritable farewell feast, for which the choicest tins from Jid Sung, the Chinese grocer, had been ordered. The guest's desire for well-seasoned dishes had been fully anticipated by the paragon head boy. There were kippers and pickled herrings, smoked salmon and caviare, and when these had been disposed of Simin brought fried fish and cold quail, a ham, several egg-dishes, and *nassi goreng*—profusely curried rice served in a salad bowl, the enormous silver rice-spoon standing up temptingly in it.

Anton felt more than satisfied with a pickled herring and some caviare, which made the toast from the poor tasteless substitute for bread seem less repugnant than it was. He had another cup of coffee and ate a banana, declining other fruit, *manggistans* and *langsaps*, just in season. Beekveldt's advice: "Take a glass of beer, man, that will put you right sooner than anything," made him shudder. The night before he had protested that he should require no breakfast at all; he would get it on board, he declared; but Beekveldt's conception of hospitality was offended by the idea that his guest should leave his house unfed. However early the hour, its significance demanded special recognition. How could this be better expressed than by a meal that would have sufficed for a dozen starving men?

"What did 'Old Grumbler' say yesterday, at your official leave-taking?" Beekveldt asked between two mouthfuls.

Anton flushed red through his bronze. The little scene, touching and pathetic, that had been enacted between Governor Brand, or "Old Grumbler," and himself, in that small, much-dreaded private room at Government House, stood suddenly before him with the distinctness of reality. It obliterated the events of the hours in between—the impression left by other official leave-takings, and of the dinner at the club, with its mad speeches and frolics, whose echo had rung in his ears ever since.

He could not answer Beekveldt directly. How could he? The recollection caught him unawares. A lump rose in his throat, and for the moment his high spirits left him. A feeling very near regret took the place of his joy and of the relief that the endless struggle was over—that he was free to do as he liked, to go where he pleased. The magic word "Europe," the land of his dreams, was forgotten, as with a sudden pang he realised the impossibility of severing himself from the life he was about to leave behind him, without feeling sore and sad. What the Governor had said, in words he would always value, was perfectly true: the old man would miss him. They had stood shoulder to shoulder in a hard fight—and they had won! He, Anton, had made Takalar what it now was: no longer a source of annoyance, a typical instance of native unwillingness and incapacity to toe the line of order and measures for the common weal, but a promising centre of activity; if well controlled and directed,

a bright future lay before it. But he knew the relative value of such results as he had achieved. To make them lasting would need the devotion of many, many years; at this moment it suddenly seemed as if the work were but half done. Remove the leading spirit, the man ready to give himself entirely to the task, able to keep cool when others grow nervous, and cheerful when others despair—and a native community will soon relapse into its inveterate way of doing the right thing wrong, or of leaving it undone.

No one, Anton reflected—and never before it had struck him so forcibly—knew better than he how necessary for Takalar was a firm, determined, and continuous policy. Would his successor proceed along the lines he had laid down, or would what he had built up be demolished? He had seen the district safely through the initial difficulties that were the necessary consequence of the annexation of the adjoining native kingdom of Goa—in so far he had fully justified the expectations of the Governor and deserved the royal approval bestowed on him at the latter's recommendation. But it was a bitter drop in the cup of self-satisfaction to think that his beloved chief, the man who had given him his confidence on credit, so to say, might, in his heart of hearts, reproach him for having availed himself of his right to a year's leave before the new *régime* was firmly and thoroughly established.

It could not be helped, however. He had his own interests to consider. The necessity of seeing the woman he loved, who was henceforth to share his life, drove him to Europe. But that he could not tell the Governor, as by her special desire the engagement was

not to be made public before he and she should have met again—in Holland.

His reply to Beekveldt's question was impersonal and evasive. Beekveldt would show little sympathy for his conscientious scruples, would laugh at the idea that he should feel uneasy at having relinquished a task that every one else agreed was splendidly fulfilled. "Give another man a chance, now that you have secured your ribbon!" Beekveldt would exclaim, and call him a sentimental idiot, unworthy of the gift of the gods: a long leave to Europe, for a whole year at least!

Breakfast over, host and guest left the back-gallery that served as dining-room, when the severance from his official life was brought still more acutely home to Anton by the sight that met his eyes as, stepping through the house, he reached the marble-paved front veranda. There, to his intense surprise, he found three of the principal native grandees of his former realm quietly seated in the well-polished rocking chairs, and evidently awaiting him. What in the world could they have come for? They knew that his authority over their district and themselves had come to an end. He had imagined them high and dry at home in Takalar, more than thirty miles away, where he had already bidden them farewell, four days previously. It puzzled him greatly what this sudden call, at this late hour, could mean.

At his approach they rose, stately, with solemn faces, and, in the awkward, uncertain fashion in which the high-born native follows the western manner of greeting, took one by one his proffered hand, after a reverential

bow, but without disclosing the motive of their visit. Anton, familiar as he was with native ways, remembered that, in accordance with their etiquette, the more important a mission, the more solemn and silent the preliminaries have to be. But time pressed. He felt forced to take the initiative and ask them straight out what had brought them to Macassar. They seemed astonished and inclined to laugh at the question. "To see you off, *Tuan Petor ! **" came the prompt reply. Anton felt more surprised than ever, and hesitated before accepting this astounding explanation. He knew they liked him ; but that they should have covered that thirty miles of road simply to have a last look at him, to escort him to the steamer, seemed beyond the bounds of possibility. The native, above all the proud Macassar nobleman, is the least sentimental creature in the world ; not often does he go out of his way to show his attachment to the European functionary forced upon him by an alien government. What belated request had they come to proffer ? What complaint drove them thus, at the eleventh hour, to the man experience had taught them they could trust ? Did they require his intercession with the Governor to beg some favour, or in some difficulty that had perhaps already arisen between themselves and the new *Controleur*, his successor ?

When, at last, a little ashamed of his suspicions, he realised that it was indeed for him and for nothing else that they had come, to give him a last greeting—

* "Your Lordship." The native word, derived from the Portuguese, for *Controleur*.

not as a superior, a master, but as a *friend*—Anton could hardly control his emotion. It was a fine, unusual recognition of what he had tried to do for them in these four years and for their people. Though not in the same sense as "Old Grumbler," they too would miss him. They had found him gentle as well as severe; determined to be just as well as respected; a reliable adviser and protector. At times, he knew, they had thought him over-exacting, too insistent on his pound of official flesh; but perhaps in the end they had liked him all the better. Natives revere the firm hand that is at the same time impartial.

The erstwhile *Tuan Petor* cast an affectionate glance at his three former subalterns who, as they stared straight before them, gave him the opportunity of watching them for the last time, letting the little group impress itself deeply on his mental retina, so as to preserve its image for the days to come.

They were in semi-gala costume, as picturesque as their high-sounding names, and suitable for the occasion. He on the left, the *Lomo* or Baron of Toped-jawa, had always amused van Weghe by the air of *bon-vivant* on his round, fat face, which wore the complacent expression of one who takes life easily, and things as they come. The moment official affairs were transacted and informal intercourse began, he could laugh heartily and loudly at any good joke; the Riddle of the Sphinx, freely translated for his delectation by Anton into the native tongue, had brought him no end of delight and an increased popularity among his peers and followers each time he retailed it. Public rumour credited him with the possession of wives and

concubines unsurpassed for their beauty. Anton had never been permitted to set eyes on one of these, so that he had always satisfied himself with the assurance that the report must be exaggerated.

The central figure of the group was Kraeng * Bonto-Bonto of Sanrabone, a tall, emaciated, middle-aged man, though alert and of remarkable vigour. He had been a famous deer-hunter in his younger days and had an eye for a horse that had stood Anton in good stead on the occasions when he had to buy one. Kraeng Bonto-Bonto was dressed in orthodox Macassar style. A tightly-fitting silk waistcoat, with long, narrow sleeves, covered his bony chest and was adorned with a closely set, double row of innumerable small filagree buttons. The *sarong*, stiffly starched and standing out widely from the waist—somewhat like the fustanelle of the Evzones, the Greek bodyguard—showed the lower part of the tight pants reaching to just above the knee. The rest of the legs was bare, while the feet were protected by sandals, fastened with finely and elaborately embroidered straps that left the toes free.

The *Galarang* of Takalar, the third member of the mission, was an old man of Herculean build, with an aquiline nose between the almost extinguished eyes. It was at Anton's instance that he had gone to Surabaia and had them examined by a specialist, who provided him with other spectacles than those he had been accustomed to buy from hawkers in Takalar, on the chance of their suiting him. He had spectacles on now, blue ones, to protect his poor old eyes against the light. *His* having come all this way, on his behalf, seemed

* A high title of nobility.

the most significant and pathetic thing of all to Anton.

All three wore *topies*, little caps of the finest fibre, artistically woven, which took the place of the *kain* *kapala* (head-cloth) of the Javanese or Malay. Their hair was cut short to the head and their eyebrows and lashes were painted, their fingers heavy with enormous rings, set with stones of problematic value. Characteristic were the gold and silver trinkets dangling beside the pouch that hung sporran-like from their girdles. This pouch contained money—when they had any!—and the ingredients for chewing: betel-nut, *sirih*, and tobacco. The *Lomo* of Topedjawa, who did not chew, was, by way of compensation, a great smoker. He generally affected a kind of European turn-out and from the small breast-pocket that coquettishly adorned his coat peeped out a beautiful cigar-case of Manilla-hemp.

The *Lomo*, too, had a nose of quite respectable proportions. In outward appearance the Macassar race is much more like the European than the Javanese, with his effeminate, unexpressive mask, or the Malay, whose broad cheek-bones and short, flat nasal organ give him an exceedingly plain and even vulgar air. The Macassarene's nose is often normally developed, in strong contrast to that of many Polynesians.

None of the three native dignitaries carried any other weapon than a small dagger, with finely worked hilt of horn or precious wood. The lance is to the Macassarene what the *keriss* * is to the Javanese and the *klewang* † to the man of Atchin—the arm *par excellence*

* A dagger or dirk.

† A sword, broad and heavy at the top.

and the prerogative of distinction and authority; but here it was the suite which, squatted in three separate groups outside the veranda, bore their respective masters' state-lances. In the case of Kraeng Bonto-Bonto of Sanrabone, who justly claimed to be of royal descent, the lance was beautifully decorated with gold. But the point of all *three* was carefully concealed, either by a wooden sheath into which it was slipped or by a strip of red cloth wound tightly round it.

CHAPTER II

IT was only a quarter of a mile from Beekveldt's house to the pier. Anton's heavy luggage had already been forwarded to the steamer the day before, and the friends proceeded thither on foot.

They followed the beautiful alley that leads straight to the harbour. The imposing canary and tamarind trees, fine, lofty crowns on huge, wrinkled trunks, afforded but scanty protection against a sun whose slanting rays treacherously invaded the wide road. Had Anton and his retinue been going in the opposite direction they would have had the glare in their faces. As it was, they did not mind.

They formed a striking procession as they went—the two Europeans in front, followed at a short distance by the chieftains, in accordance with the native sense of subordination and punctilio. In the rear came Simin and Wongso, at the head of the picturesque bodyguard, which in the eyes of the western spectator paying a first visit to these regions would have seemed a bit shabby and ragged. The two "boys" were jointly responsible for the safe transport of Anton's small luggage and for the sum total of Wongso's: *i.e.*, two portmanteaux and the large box made of paraffin tins, painted black and secured by an immense, showy

padlock, which contained Wongso's worldly goods. These, bound by lengths of the hard, coarse twine made from the *aren* palm, dangled, in rhythmical cadence, with a creaking sound at every jerk, from a polished bamboo, shouldered by a couple of coolies, one in front and one behind. In addition, an imposing bunch of *langsaps* and *manggistans* was slung over the pole: a present from Beekveldt to Mevrouw Jeanette de Wil* Anton's married sister in Djombang, where he was to spend a night on his journey by rail from Surabaia to Batavia.

The nearer the party drew to its destination, the more numerous and animated it became; before it finally reached the harbour the number of Europeans at its head had increased to eight. Anton was well known and generally liked in Macassar; the small, jovial town was quite interested in his departure. Besides, an early morning stroll to see an acquaintance off, with the chance to poke unrestrictedly about on one of the fine steamers of the Royal Packet Line, was a diversion that appealed to many. So those of his friends who lived near the route that van Weghe had to take to reach the *Boni* were on the look-out for him, and gaily fell in as the little company came along.

By the time it halted at the quay, Anton found himself escorted by a body of at least a dozen Europeans: officers—by whom he was much esteemed since the successful expedition to Goa—functionaries, and business men. In the interval, his good spirits had returned; the small cloud of depression had completely vanished. How could he help feeling proud and glad, in the beams of appreciation and kindly feeling showered

upon him? Even the merest acquaintances were wishing him God-speed, and a pleasant time in dear old Holland! As they crossed the Chinese quarter several Celestials came hurrying out of their shops and bowing, muttering a few respectful words in Malay; he was the hero of the day and no mistake!

Stepping on to the pier, he was met by a fresh surprise. The military band, stationed there for the occasion, at once struck up a gay Souza march, drowning the noise of winch and falling bales, for the *Boni* was still loading; while a new batch of friends, who had chosen to await him here, welcomed him with a loud "Hurrah!" One of them had a lucky idea. At his hint they all joined hands and, to the tune of the band, danced backwards and forwards, to and fro, in front of Anton, intimating that he was not to be allowed to go on board and leave them. Such a reception was as unexpected as it was delightful. While passing along the narrow gangway he again felt a lump rise in his throat, but this time it was exhilaration brought it there, the sudden insight that life after all was a glorious thing, and his fellow-creatures highly sympathetic. For the moment, however, little time for philosophy was left him; he must relinquish the rôle of guest for that of host. Several persons, ladies among them, had gathered on the poop. They were there for him. Hands were stretched out from all sides, and each of these good people had a claim to be spoken to, and thanked for having come. Had the Governor arrived? he asked himself nervously. Was he perhaps awaiting him in some quiet corner, anxious to get the whole thing over and, escaping the bustle,

return to his work? No—he was told in answer to his inquiry—Governor Brand had not yet come.

As in his hurry to perform his pressing duties his foot touched the deck, it slipped, and he would have lost his equilibrium, had not an officer, springing forward to shake hands with him, with a : " Steady, old man ! " caught him in the act of falling. They both laughed, but a fat little woman, whose round dark face was lavishly bedecked with powder, watched the incident with an expression of alarm in her eyes and, in Anton's hearing, muttered to another : "*Tjilaka !*" —a bad omen.

Anton shrugged his shoulders, and in another moment found himself surrounded by men and women. Here was the Assistant-Resident, Mr. Blok—after the Governor the highest authority in the place—with his wife and other married colleagues ; and three of the four doctors Macassar could boast of ; and the Macassar schoolmistress whom Anton had known as a boy in Holland. Presently his way was barred by a big, fair man who asked if *he* was to be ignored ! This was Dommers, Anton's greatest friend in Celebes, a Captain in the Engineers, just returned that same morning from a visit of inspection to Saleier. Glad as he was to see him, Anton could not give him more than a hasty pressure of the hand and a few heartfelt words, with the promise to write now and then—for he was seized from behind and pushed to the centre of a group where that most important personage, the Assistant-Resident, was going to make a speech in his honour. Submitting to his fate, he allowed himself to be placed in front of the orator who had already taken up his

position, and disclosed his intention by several loud coughs and the ominous words: "Ladies and gentlemen!"—but got no further.

"What the deuce is he waiting for?" Anton thought. "Why can't he get it over?"

Suddenly he understood. Of course, *there must be champagne*, and it was *he* who had to provide it! How could he be so forgetful?

Beekveldt, at this critical juncture, appeared at his elbow. "There is no——" he hurriedly began.

"I know, I know! I must order it at once," and Anton turned to carry out his intention. But the other, understanding that the man of the hour could not be allowed to leave his post, with an: "I'll see to it. Half a sec.!" vanished in a great hurry.

There was a pause, and whispers and titterings, but the announcement that the wine would be there in a moment soon calmed the commotion. The delay was made good use of by the orator. With a gesture, addressed to no one in particular, indicating that he would be back in a moment, Mr. Blok stepped to the bulwarks and called out something to the band on the pier that made them abruptly break off the well-known tune they were playing. Anton heard him tell the bandmaster to be ready to fall in with the usual *fanfare*, the moment the speech was over. In order to give the signal for this part of the programme, Blok's *oppas* (native policeman) was posted where he could see both band and speaker. Having made these arrangements, Blok returned to the centre of the group for whose edification the speech was to be delivered. In the meantime the champagne had arrived, and

foamed in the glasses that were quickly taken up by dozens of hands.

Now the big man could address his audience. Fixing Anton through his spectacles, with a cold, abstracted stare, he began again :

" Ladies and gentlemen, the moment, always solemn, when one of us deserts our small community, is, in this case, exceptionally solemn and important. We have to say good-bye to a man who has won our appreciation, our esteem, our affection. His achievements in Takalar are well known, and have been lately approved by Her Majesty (here he removed his gold-galooned cap) our—ahem!—beloved Queen (here the cap was replaced on his head). Ladies and gentlemen, we shall all miss him from our midst ; at the same time, we must be unselfish and hope he will enjoy a holiday that has never been more richly deserved. Controleur van Weghe (here he frowned and fixed his small beady eyes more intently on Anton), let me tell you openly—ahem!—you have made history in Takalar! (Here some young bloods in the rear began to clap their hands. They were immediately hushed down and the flow continued). Ladies and gentlemen, it is exactly four years since the expedition, rendered necessary by the arrogance of Goa's late ruler, was decided upon . . . "

And so on, and so on—a flood of commonplaces in which the oft-told story lost its last vestige of stirring power streamed over Anton, who stood, with bowed head, a formal smile on his well-cut features. How often had he not been forced to listen to these same stereotyped allusions to what he had accomplished,

now made all the more hateful by the fact that it was from Blok he had to hear them—*Blok*, of all the people in the world.

For Blok and Blok heartily disliked each other; they disagreed on every single question. Of all the things nearest Anton's heart none had any interest for the older man, while he could only laugh at Blok's continual self-advertisement and his passion for pomp and power. To Anton, the other's inability to judge people and things by their *intrinsic* value had soon revealed itself; and from the first Blok had hated him, resenting his independence of character and the fearlessness of his opinions. The mere suggestion that one so much younger than himself, standing on a lower rung of the hierarchical ladder, should discuss matters with him freely and on a basis of equality, and now and then even contradict him, made Blok furious, though he had never shown it in a frank, straightforward way. Later he had envied the very reputation he was now emphasising so loudly, and on several occasions had secretly tried to undermine the exceptionally good understanding which existed between *Controleur* van Weghe and Governor Brand, his immediate chief. It had always been a thorn in the Assistant-Resident's flesh that Anton should be removed from his jurisdiction. For every other *Controleur* the only way of approach to the highest authority in Celebes was through the intermediary of an Assistant-Resident; but Takalar's political importance, especially since the introduction of the new *régime*, had made it necessary to give its local administrator the unique position of dealing directly with the Governor of the island.

Why did the man thus disposed against him elect to make himself the mouthpiece of the general appreciation and the good wishes of all the other people present? The explanation was simple enough. Persons of Blok's stamp, placed in a position of authority, can never stand aside and let things take their natural course; they feel obliged to convince the crowd that it is *their* recognition of the importance of any event whatever that gives it its significance. As long as the majority can be lured into an acceptance of the fiction that, even for the expression of its feelings, some official intermediary is required, officials of the Blok type are safe. But they must grasp every opportunity that offers of consolidating this fictitious authority. In the fact that Blok, notwithstanding his personal antipathy, should think it necessary to constitute himself the interpreter of the regard felt by all Macassar for the hero of the day, Anton was quite justified in seeing a proof that in this far corner of the world his departure was a big affair, an unusual item in the *menu* of the European community. While amused at the irony of the situation, the knowledge flattered him, and helped him to endure the strain that was being put upon his patience.

For Blok's platitudes went on and on. Behind him Anton heard a smothered laugh, while signs of restlessness were freely given. He felt the artificial smile on his face hardening into a stony grin—when the speaker was stopped by an intervention as unexpected as it was effective.

Suddenly the band on the pier burst into the stately tones of the "Wilhelmus," the national anthem, its

deep notes mercilessly drowning every other sound. Each head was turned in that direction. The orator flushed with anger. Who had dared to play this practical joke on him? Had the bandmaster gone mad? The next moment the explanation came. It had the finality of a Delphic oracle.

"The Governor!" ran through the assemblage, as one after the other hats, caps, and helmets were taken off, in deference to the familiar strains.

The Governor, of course! Though not in state, he was there in his official character, and the bandmaster had spontaneously given His Honour the welcome always accorded whenever he ventured within the radius of trumpets and cornets.

Recovering from its surprise, the company laughed heartily at the incident. All clustered round Anton, glass in hand, to "clink" with him, in the Dutch fashion. He did not, however, await the thrice repeated "hurrah" that was raised in his honour; freeing himself from his well-wishers he hurried down to the gangway, to meet the man whose arrival had just been announced. In a couple of strides he was in the saloon below, in time to welcome the Governor at the other entrance. After a respectful greeting he made as though to lead him to the poop, but Mr. Brand shook his head.

"You must excuse me. I have only come to say once more good-bye to you, van Weghe," he said. "I am quite satisfied just to have seen you—I shall not disturb your last moments with the others. No, thanks, no champagne for me—it does not suit me at this hour of the day. . . . Here is my hand, my friend!

Thank you for all you have done. I suppose you feel a different man to what you were when you first came to Celebes, five years ago ! ”

“ Thanks to you, *yes*, Governor ! ” Anton muttered, for the moment quite unable to say more.

“ So good-bye, ” “ Old Grumbler ” repeated, and with these words he turned on his heel and went straight back in the direction of the gangway. Next moment he stopped, and, laying his hand on the shoulder of the younger man who had followed him, he said, a little shakily :

“ We shall not forget each other, my boy ! ” Then, after a moment’s pause : “ When are you going to be married ? ” adding before Anton had recovered from his surprise : “ Let me know in plenty of time. I should like you to have something from me, something substantial that you can take pleasure in showing to your bride and her friends. ”

“ May I ask who told you, Governor, that I am engaged to be married ? ” Anton inquired, in utter astonishment.

The old man smiled. Then, reproachfully : “ Why did you not tell me yourself ? ”

“ I have told nobody, Governor. Not even my sister in Djombang. She has still to hear it, and for the present she will be the only one. ”

“ Anyway, my best wishes. I feel rather proud that I am the first to know. ”

“ I am only wondering how you do. ”

“ I don’t see why I should make any mystery of it. Some time ago I got a letter from Holland, asking me in the interests of the young lady, closely related to

the writer, what I thought of you—not officially, but *as a man*. He was particularly inquisitive about your morals, see ? ”

“ How extraordinary ! ” Anton could not help exclaiming in his annoyance at the idea of his character being inquired into behind his back.

“ Not at all ! ” came the calm reply. “ Had *I* been the girl’s nearest relative, I might probably have done the same. Between ourselves—*I am sorry I am not !* ”

With this kind and significant word of farewell the Governor walked away and did not again look round. To Anton at the gangway, watching him go, it was as if something very precious and vital had gone with him. The man who was left felt at that moment more lonely than he had ever done in the wilds of Takalar, that lonely spot upon which he was now turning his back for good.

CHAPTER III

IN the second week of March, four days after his departure from Macassar, Anton van Weghe stepped out of the Batavia express from Surabaya, at Djombang, in Java. There, on the platform to meet him, was his brother-in-law, Govert de Wilt, who told him that Jeannette had been unable to come, for two reasons. First, because she had to be very careful as in a couple of months she was expecting another baby, and, secondly, because the motor car, in which he himself had driven down to fetch him, was only a two-seater. Both items of information were new to Anton, so that he forgot to laugh at the manner, so typical of Govert, in which they were given. The first he took for what as a matter of course. It seemed inevitable in the case of a strong, healthy young woman like Jeannette that, besides the one he vaguely remembered and two others born in the course of the five years during which he had not seen her, she should have another child. The second announcement, that a motor car stood waiting for them outside the station to drive them to Soewinogro, the sugar-factory of which Govert was the manager, seemed for the moment the more important of the two. Not as an outward and visible sign of his brother-in-law's

importance, but for the simple reason that he had never driven in a motor car before. In his Batavia days they were almost non-existent ; and in Celebes none had yet appeared.

It was not without some nervous trepidation that the man who in Takalar, in the most critical moments of his life, had shown the greatest coolness and courage, and had, as a matter of course, broken in his own ponies picked out from the half-wild herds that graze on the downs between the Lompobatang and the sea, took his seat in the new conveyance, beside a driver whose ability in that direction he had no reason to feel in any way sure of. No time was given him to remember that one of Govert's principles in life was to do everything thoroughly and well, and that, if not handy by nature, he had become so by sheer force of tenacity and will.

The start of the "runabout," a "Spiker," was to the novice bewildering. First it shook with internal rage. Then all at once it dashed forward, rounding a corner with a treacherous jerk, and the next, into the main road, in a bound that threw Anton from his seat, and brought him down again with a most unpleasant bump.

"Hold tight !" Govert said.

Now it raced along a broad avenue, formed by the rows of assam trees that lined the roadway. The passenger held the little breath left him. He saw no need for this excessive speed. Had Govert suddenly gone mad ? Fortunately, at this hour of the day, the traffic was not very great, and when the man at the wheel, by a single sound of the horn, made the light

dos-à-dos drawn by rat-like horses, and the heavy carts roughly copying the slow movements of the buffaloes that dragged them, hurry to the side of the road so as to leave it open to the vehicle "that ran of itself," Anton began to feel admiration for his skill. Seeing that they passed each separate object safely—though it was often a close shave!—the victim's equanimity in so far returned that he resigned himself to his fate, and even began to realise that an experience like this had a fascination of its own. But just as he was congratulating himself upon the pluck with which he was rising to an entirely novel situation, they arrived at a point where another road crossed the one they were following, and he again prepared himself for the worst.

How they got safely through the crowd of babbling and bargaining natives at the cross-ways, squatted or standing about, seemed a miracle. The horn now sounded uninterruptedly, and Govert considerably diminished his speed; but, even thus announced and held in check, the runabout continually threatened to prove an instrument of death to these primitive creatures, who treated time and life as things of no value. Several of them, clad in indigo-blue, which their brighter head-gear did little to enliven, cowered down by the roadside as soon as the two Europeans came in sight, their traditional sign of respect transporting them beyond the zone of danger. Others, however, did not stir before the modern Juggernaut was close upon them, and it was only their deer-like alertness that enabled them to jump aside in the nick of time. But collisions could not entirely be avoided. Once the car bumped up against an enormous basket, filled

with native tit-bits and dangling from the bamboo balanced on a polished naked shoulder ; whereupon the whole stock of merchandise described a parabola in the air, showering manna upon a group farther on. Another time it was a gong, carried in like manner, that was struck just at the moment its owner, a native musician accompanied by a gorgeously decked out *ronggeng*, or dancing girl, was about to enter into conversation with a *hadji*.* The large metallic disc gave a loud groan as it swung madly upwards, and the shock brought the artist to his knees, though he managed to escape destruction.

A long open road now stretched out before them, and Govert, pointing to a slender chimney in the distance, towering high above a hazy bank of green indicative of native villages, gave the word : " Soewinogro ! "

The road was bare and sunlit ; hot, though the day was still young, and dusty, in spite of the rainy monsoon, not yet completely over. Here Anton began to breathe normally ; but Fate and Govert laughed at his optimism. Before he quite knew what was happening, he became conscious that the speed of the car was increasing every second ; it would soon pass beyond control. To his horror Govert kept perfectly cool ; with an eye on the pedometer he counted aloud at short intervals :

" Twenty-seven . . . twenty-eight . . . twenty-nine . . . thirty ! " The last reading seemed to give him unbounded satisfaction.

The car leapt over the way with the impetus of a greyhound in close touch with the hare. Panic seized

* One who has performed the *hadj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca.

the passenger. But he managed to control it and to articulate the words :

"Don't you think we are going a *little* too fast, Govert ? "

The other looked at him reproachfully. But a moment later, apparently moved by the uneasiness he was causing, he said consolingly :

"Don't be afraid—we can't go any faster. She has reached her limit. But she does her work well, my word ! She is just out of the doctor's hands, and is fit as a fiddle."

At the top of the stately flight of steps that led up to the manager's house, Jeannette, in a wide *peignoir*, appeared looking out for her brother.

The car entered the gate and, in a broad curve, made for the dwelling at the end of the sunny front garden. The drive was beautifully even—laid with pulverised sea-shells and fine gravel, firmly rolled ; the space it encircled was filled with flowers in large, whitewashed pots and oblong tins, about two feet high, which had once contained paraffin. These were still marked "Devoes," and had travelled far before reaching their present state of non-activity.

In close proximity to the house, roses abounded ; but at the foot of the gigantic waringin tree that stood sentinel on the left and afforded the only shadowy spot where in another hour or two all else would be a glowing furnace, ferns and orchids were heaped together in a waving, irregular mass of green, covering the reddish clay of the soil as well as the spreading roots and massive trunk of their protector.

A minute later, and brother and sister were

embracing each other in the front veranda, kept cool by enormous white-and-green striped blinds, or "sails," stretched in the three gigantic spaces between the four pillars of the façade. By these huge blinds, not only were the sun-rays excluded, but also—to some extent—the outer atmosphere that, as the day advanced, became hotter and hotter.

CHAPTER IV

“**A**T last!” Jeannette cried, with a forcible hug that made Anton, given the delicate position she was in, a little shy. She understood. Laughing away a touch of embarrassment she took his arm and drew him further inside.

“Govert has told you, I suppose. I hope this will complete the series! Four is quite enough. I begin to feel like an old hen.”

“You are a dear!” he said. The note of intimacy at once bridged over the distance of the years since he had seen her. In a flash of thought he realised how near she was to him, how much part of himself, his recollections, his youth and all things connected with home and what it stands for—she was a mother personified, a Madonna, ripe yet graceful. He added: “You remember how you used to love your dolls, and how angry you were when we said nasty things about them? The maternal instinct must always have been strong in you!”

Jeannette smiled softly, but did not answer. Then, holding him at arm's length and examining him attentively, she remarked:

“How thin you have grown! You were much stouter. But it suits you. I like you better as you

are. Only you must have had a terrible time in your wilderness."

"Sometimes it was a bit hard—that is so. But nothing is better for a man than plenty of exercise and work. It keeps silly ideas out, and the machine in good order. Govert would tell you the same."

"Oh, Govert!" she exclaimed. "He is always at it, and always will be. But with you it is different. With him it is nature; *you* must have acquired it. All the more credit to you."

Anton nodded pensively. The last time he had seen Jeannette seemed centuries away. The contrast was striking between what he had been then—disgusted with life and with himself, embittered at not having obtained what he wanted—and his present happy, hopeful state of mind. Though only thirty-three, he had come to realise that the things you obtain without a proportional effort are mostly of little value, and can never increase your mental stamina.

"Such a lot has happened since you were with us in Koenigan," she said, "when Govert was first employee at Tjileduk, and it was all I could do to make ends meet. The chance of his ever becoming an administrator seemed so far ahead that we had begun to wonder if we could afford to wait. He even thought of trying his luck at something else, especially when his aunt Robbers died and left him that legacy; and then he heard that Soewinogro was to be reconstructed, and that the Bellaers family—the owners—were looking out for a manager who could put up some capital. Here was our chance, and we took it. But no sooner were we here than we feared we had made a mistake,

for the first year everything went wrong. Govert did not speak Madurese, and as he was entirely dependent on his employees, there was often trouble with the coolies. However, the second year we breathed more freely, and now it is all plain sailing."

Smiling at her own superstition, she turned and tapped the wooden framework of the marble table behind her.

"You seem in clover," Anton said, taking a comprehensive survey of his surroundings. "This is a palace."

"Quite," she agreed. "The heaps of furniture it swallows, and the army of servants it requires! But come, I'll show you everything, the children included. I have a French nurse for them. She is rather nice—you're not to flirt with her, remember! Or have you left that old habit of yours behind in Celebes, too?"

Anton smiled, but the remark did not please him. It was not in keeping with his intention to tell Jeanette the great news: that he had asked Annie Hartog to be his wife, that in principle she had accepted him, and that it was with a view to their getting married in Europe that he was going home. Apart from this, he found the casual, lighthearted allusion to the past almost indelicate. It too painfully recalled the tragic circumstances of which he had made her his only confidant, five years ago; when, desperately in love with Marie Delmaar, the crisis of that affair, with its threatening scandal, had necessitated his asking to be removed from Batavia. For the husband had discovered their relations, and had insisted that if Anton did not

leave the place at once he would denounce him to his chief. This would have meant the end of his career in the Civil Service, and, the woman he loved refusing to follow him, no choice was left him. Broken-hearted, in the interval that elapsed before being given a new appointment, far from Batavia, he got leave of absence and went to his sister in Cheribon. She was in the hills at the time, at Koeningan, where the factory Tjileduk had its nurseries. He confided to her the whole miserable tale, taking his full share of the blame, and bowing to her just reproach, that he should have allowed things to go so far and become entangled in an intrigue with a married woman ; for while she did not withhold her sympathy, Jeannette could not help showing how wholly she condemned any tampering with the bond between husband and wife. In her conception of life there was no room for unfaithfulness—such a possibility did not even enter.

Why rake up a sordid affair he had expiated in his wilderness and remind him of a name he had taught himself to forget? Above all, how could Jeannette represent him as having indulged in *flirtations*; she who knew, or ought to know, the trouble and despair that mad adventure had caused him. Was it possible that she had forgotten the true details of the story, or had her own standard of right and wrong appreciably lowered in the meantime? For the moment his readiness to make her the recipient of another secret, however much this one would probably please her, subsided.

His thoughts were given a new direction by her sudden exclamation :

"But where is your ribbon?"

He laughed. The question dispelled his resentment.

"Do you think I am such an utter ass as to wear the thing, except on official occasions?"

"Why not? I was looking forward to showing you off. And a 'thing,' you call it! Surely it was not given you for nothing."

"I suppose you would like to find it on my pyjamas."

"You are very independent, now that you *have* it. But you'll be a great disappointment to Cor and Minnie—they expect to see a huge medal shining on Uncle Tony's breast! What shall we do to console them? But never mind, come along," and with that she took his arm again and led him into the cool, dark apartment that occupied the middle of the house, and was the means of access to all its other parts.

Shortly afterwards Anton found himself sitting in the nursery, which occupied the larger portion of the annex that stood on the left side of the main building, Minnie perched on one knee and Cor on the other; Jeannette was in a low chair, and Mademoiselle stood smiling in the background. The eyes of all were fixed on the miniature model of a native Macassar house that Uncle Tony had brought for his little nieces.

It was indeed a beautiful piece of workmanship, and spoke well for the skill and patience of the native *magang* (clerk) from whom Anton had bought it for a *ringgit* (four shillings and two pence). It was only half a foot high and three quarters of a foot long, but was a faithful copy, to its minutest details, of just such a house as Anton had known there by the hundred, imitated in split bamboo and the hairy excrescences

of the *aren* palm, except for the roof, where, true to life, tiny slices of the *nipa* palm served as tiles. The artist had forgotten neither the buffalo-skull, always nailed to the apex of the roof, and here copied, on the minutest scale, in hard white wood, nor the buffalo-skin—for which he had used the skin of a mouse—that covers the floor—always of light material and full of chinks in a Macassar native dwelling—so as to protect the inhabitants, while asleep, against a possible treacherous lance-thrust from below. For all these houses stand on piles, and so did the model.

"It is much too valuable for the children to play with," Jeannette observed, shaking her head. "You ought to keep it for yourself, or give it to some museum."

But when she saw the expression of alarm on the little faces at the suggestion that their newly acquired treasure should be taken away from them, her motherly feeling gained the upper hand, and she contented herself by saying :

"Anyhow, they'll have to wait some time before they can appreciate it as it deserves ! "

Here Cor, the four-year-old, gave a proof of premature diplomacy.

"It will be Gerard's too, mummy," she pleaded. "I shall show it him when we go to Holland. We will take care of it for him."

Her mother did not answer. Suddenly rising from her seat, she left the room. Mademoiselle and Anton exchanged a look of sympathetic understanding.

Later, while passing his sister's bedroom, shut off in the daytime by Singapore-doors that left the upper part of the entrance open but sufficiently safeguarded

the privacy within, Anton heard a suppressed sob, which seemed fully to justify his tender concern. Jeannette had indeed escaped to hide an irrepressible outburst of grief, called up by Cor's innocent words.

"How keenly a heart like hers must feel the separation from her boy," Anton said to himself. Though Gerard could not be better treated or looked after than where he was—in his grandfather's house—the mother must feel a pang whenever his name was mentioned. He was only seven.

Remembering how Jeannette had told him that Govert would be back from the factory in another half-hour, Anton went to wash his hands and face and freshen himself up generally. This done he made his way to the back veranda, where in the cosy corner reserved for the formal gatherings of the elder members of the household it was relatively cool. In the Dutch fashion gin and bitters for the men and lemonade for the ladies were put ready on a large silver tray.

Jeannette was waiting for him. She had succeeded in mastering her emotion, but it was evident that, for the moment, she could only think of *one* thing.

"Gerard will be eight in June," she began. "By that time you will be in Holland, lucky you! I want you to take charge of my present to him. Of course you will go and see him, won't you?"

"First thing I shall do," Anton assured her.

At this moment Govert's step was heard, and Jeannette hurriedly whispered:

"Don't speak of Gerard when Govert is here—he hates to see me fret about it. He takes Gerard's being in Holland more as a matter of course, and

thinks it a very lucky thing for the boy to be in Grandpapa de Wilt's charge. He misses him too, but what it costs *me* only a mother knows. As for Gerard himself, write me, will you, *if he is really happy*. Tell him we shall come to Holland as soon as possible, if only for six months——"

"I'll tell him, and I promise to write you all about him," said Anton.

CHAPTER V

IN the East, all who indulge in a siesta have their day broken in two irregular halves. The first leaves an impression of an ever increasing outpour of sunshine that reaches its acme shortly after noon ; the second brings with it the growing consciousness that relief, in the shape of welcome darkness, is at hand. Both begin as a coming to life again, after an interval of total oblivion ; but while the early morning, following upon the coolness of night, is fresh and invigorating, the afternoon only allows of a slow recovery from the heat, which still rests, with terrific weight, upon the world, making humanity feel as if placed under a huge glass bell.

The midday slumber, passed in a close, stifling atmosphere, has more of the character of torpor than of refreshing sleep. Tempting as this repose after a heavy meal may be, the awakening, an hour or two later, is anything but pleasant. The mind is confused and weary, and the body only asks to be allowed to lie in an easy chair and quench an unbearable thirst with many cups of hot tea, which, paradoxical as it may sound, by its sudorific qualities gives a certain relief.

A more efficient method of becoming stout and indolent than by eating large quantities of rice, meat,

fish, and fruit at half-past one, and then going to bed, as is a prevalent custom among Europeans in the Dutch Indies, is hardly conceivable. But for centuries—here as elsewhere—a certain portliness was the hall-mark of a life of dignity, exempt from toil and hardship ; and it is not to be wondered at if it is only quite recently that a younger generation, detecting the danger, has begun to shun the temptations of the table and the siesta.

Ever since he realised, in the solitude of Celebes, that thus far he had lived the life of a drone, Anton van Weghe had given up sleeping in the daytime. His one way of escape from disgust with himself and with existence lay in work, work, and again work ; to put into practice this principle, adopted not an hour too soon, he had to be sober and frugal, and for the last few years he had been simple and sparing as a monk. This had had a striking effect upon his outlook on things and on his spirits. Instead of complaining that there were pleasures he must give up, he felt proud that he could do without them, and a cheerful, even temper took the place of his former morbid moods and fits of depression. It was this thorough cleansing of mind and body that had enabled him to bear his loneliness ; and not only to emerge successfully from the lengthy struggle with himself, but to do good deeds for his country and his fellow-creatures. In Takalar, during the hottest hours of the day, he usually retired to a cool spot in the house and kept himself awake by writing letters, or enjoying the papers from Holland and Java that reached him at intervals and several all together. He read them, not the last news first,

but in chronological order, which is the exile's way of reconstructing time and far-off happenings.

To-day—as while staying with his friend Beekveldt in Macassar—he had sinned against his convictions, and paid due homage to the copious repast Jeannette had ordered in his honour. Remembering that in Holland fresh ingredients for special Indian dishes are unobtainable, she had taken particular care to provide some dainties which even in Java only appear on state occasions. Besides, her cook was justly celebrated for his *sambals* and *sajoerans*; she wished to give her brother a sample of his talent that she was sure he would appreciate. What could he do but show his good will by eating as much as possible? Now he regretted his politeness, though the meal had not failed to leave a picturesque impression behind it. When it was over and the family had dispersed, he went to his room, and, stretching himself out on the enormous bed, tried to get a little rest. Unable to sleep, he lay, half dreaming, half awake, the romance of that Gargantuan feast of mingled odours and pungent flavours, of multifarious dishes and multicoloured sauces that constitutes the Indian *rysttafel*, or rice repast, still in his body and mind. It is only in a big house of stately proportions, run by ample means, and with an army of servants, that this meal can be given in its proper setting, in all the splendour of an oriental frame.

The flaw in the picture, caused by the principal figures being European, not Asiatics, seated on chairs instead of cushions, and using spoon and fork instead of fingers, was more than compensated for by the spotless elegance of the accessories. Damask, crystal, and

flowers took the place of princely emblems and fantastic paraphernalia, which, however much they may add to the local colour and appeal to the imagination, contribute little to stimulate the appetite. Still less indispensable were the eructations, hiccups, and smacking of the lips with which the native freely expresses his satisfaction at what has been set before him, so that the omission of these utterances, so intolerably disgusting to the European ear, would in *his* case mean nothing short of a lack of good manners. Another advantage of the Western above the Eastern interpretation of the meal was the table-talk, looked upon as an essential by the former, while totally neglected or even regarded as a breach of etiquette by the latter.

The gay note still present in Anton's mind was Govert's individual way of attacking meat, game, fish and shrimps, crabs and oysters, eggs and vegetables, successively presented by servants who, only three in number, succeeded in giving the illusion of an endless chain of attendants, by their quick re-appearances, the uniformity of their costume, and a superficial likeness in features and gait.

Even in this small matter, his brother-in-law showed himself the careful administrator, the man who is punctilious in detail without ever losing sight of the ultimate aim in view. He submitted, on a small scale, the raw material before him to the same process his cane was subjected to in the first stage of the making of sugar—by being sent through the mill. He sorted, skinned, crushed, and mingled the food before him, took the flesh from the bones of fish and

fowl, extracted the meat from the shells of crab, shrimp and egg—laying all finally on a foundation of rice which he dyed and plentifully watered with various concoctions and sauces in the shape of the spicy *sambals* and tasty *sajoerans*; this done, spoon in hand, he acquitted himself of the important task of mixing all together into one unrecognisable whole, before allowing himself to taste it. After this elaborate preparation, the final stage, the eating, was a relatively short affair; the quicker the pile before him vanished, the greater was Anton's astonishment at Govert's seemingly unlimited capacity.

He had always known him as a big eater, and was ready to acknowledge that a machine like Govert, run at high pressure, required large quantities of fuel. But why should he make his meal a task, instead of a pleasure, neglecting in his absorption to take any part in the conversation? Except for a complaint that there was something wrong with the new instalment for making lump-sugar, which had to be in good working order before the opening of the campaign in the following month, and the announcement that a man was coming from Solo to look into it that afternoon, so that he would be unable to show Anton over the factory as he had promised, he left Jeannette and their guest to do all the talking. To Anton's regret, Mademoiselle did not appear. She had her meal separately, with the children.

Intimate as were the little company at table, Anton had been unable to tell his secret then; however great Govert's discretion—taciturn as he was—he felt he could only give his sister the great news when he and

she were alone. She was quite unprepared to hear it ; for several reasons he had preferred not to mention in his letters his matrimonial plans. He had asked Annie to be his wife, and she had not refused, but had made it a condition that he should come to Holland in order to meet again after all these years and be sure if they really loved each other, before entering into a formal engagement. It would require some time to impart all this to Jeannette, and it could only be done in the strictest confidence. If Governor Brand had not shown him he knew all about it, Anton would never have spoken, however desirous he was of explaining to his chief the real reason that called him to Europe, and made him give up a task not yet completely finished.

At the back of de Wilt's house was a large open hall, used as a dining-room and opening on to a veranda, which terminated in a row of Doric pillars, four in number, similar to those in front of the house, but smaller and shorter, as here the roof was lower and the veranda did not stretch along the whole width of the structure, but had a small room on either side. The central opening between the pillars gave access to an open platform protected by a low balustrade, from whence marble steps led down into the garden.

Here, too, large green and white striped linen blinds shut out the midday glare, but at this time of the afternoon—about half-past four—a servant had just rolled them up, and the three wide open spaces provided an uninterrupted view of surroundings that here and there still caught the sun, but were in the main already beyond its reach. This part of the house and the

garden immediately behind it lay entirely in shadow long before the sun began to sink. It was therefore the place that first became cool, and afforded the best refuge at the tea-hour; just as the front veranda was the most sheltered in the morning, when the family drank their early coffee. It was to the back gallery that Anton returned, after his abortive attempts at sleep.

This afternoon the sky was of a metallic polish, after the heavy rainfall of the previous days. Only a single cloud hung, scarf-like, low on the horizon, and strangely reflected the glow from the west.

The approach of the Eastern night gives a touch of melancholy to the soul. Anton, stepping on to the open platform and resting both hands on the balustrade, looked pensively at the scene before him. It did not do much to heighten his spirits. A vista of low fields, covered by irregular squares and patches of cane and rice in shades running from yellow to green, varied by banks of darker hue and framed by a brownish line of bare hills in the distance, and, still farther away, the dark silhouette of a large, pudding-shaped volcano, sleepy, yet overawing an area of a hundred square miles, was all that met his gaze.

But, turning to the left, he suddenly became keenly interested. For here—not vaguely sketched, but a solid fact, not sleepy, but a huge workshop about to resume a formidable task, though it had not yet actually commenced it—rose the factory, its close proximity barring a free outlook in that direction.

Amazing was the impression made by the solid pile of irregular buildings in the midst of the unpretentious,

primitive landscape. There it stood, covering an enormous piece of ground ; with its lofty central hall, containing the boilers, condensers, and centrifuges, surrounded by the laboratoria, storehouses, and offices ; with its oblong granary-like mill-house, where soon, during three or four months, myriads of cane stems would be swallowed, the gigantic molars masticating unceasingly, day and night ; with its yards filled with buffalo carts and its sheds and hangars full of trucks, waiting for the signal to go out to the fields and bring the harvest home, either slowly, along the deeply rutted roads, or quicker, by means of the Decauville railway.

High above all towered the chimney, no longer slender as Anton had seen it that morning, in the distance, but massive, conveying the impression of dominant pride. Now he noticed that it bore an inscription, "Soewinogro," and a date, "1903," the year of the reconstruction of the factory, marking the revival of the glorious days of the early 'nineties.

Forgetting that the campaign had not yet begun, and drawing upon past memories of just such a factory in full working, Anton was able to complete the picture and imagine the colossal monument of human energy before him bustling with life, like an immense beehive.

Faint sounds already reached him ; the preparatory work had begun. But from the moment the campaign opened the roar would be incessant ; any European in the immediate neighbourhood unless thoroughly inured to it would be unable to sleep for it, night or day. An endless working day of two thousand four

hundred hours, necessitating two separate gangs of workmen and a staff in relays to control them; a strenuous toil that at the end of the campaign left fat people thin and thin people like skeletons; a continuous strain imposed upon all concerned, absorbing every thought and every effort, above all from those responsible for the ultimate result. Brains, muscles, and sinews had throughout to do their utmost, to enable the perfect inventions of experience and genius to attack the cane with success, and, even at the cost of bodily torture and chemical disintegration, force it to yield its precious element—*sugar*.

In a vision Anton saw how this wonderful industry had grown. The time had been, not so very long ago, that the cane was crushed and its juice squeezed out by manual labour, and the sugar crystallised from the syrup by Chinamen, who for centuries had been the pioneers in the field and kept the secret of the boiling to themselves. Then the Government had made sugar-making a state monopoly, and for several decades had kept the industry in bondage; it was only in the latter part of the last century that this enormous source of wealth and revenue, emancipated from tutelage and led into new channels by private initiative and the perfectioning of methods, had made headway, striding with large strides towards its present development.

But what had impressed Anton most as a layman, the first time—in Cheribon—he had seen a factory in working, was the appearance it made in the night time. Five years ago he had visited the factory Tjileduk while the campaign was in full swing; and the effect

of the immense building, brilliantly lit from end to end with electric light and all alive in the midst of the sleeping world, was a sight he would never forget. It stood out like a torch against the neutral, nocturnal sky, an emblem of Western civilisation and progress held high above the indolent East. In the 10 : despairing moments of his life, when the hopelessness of his circumstances spelt Hell, when nothing in the tropics seemed able to understand him, it beckoned to him as a friend, a fellow-sufferer, strange here as himself, but strong and daring enough to stand alone and send a ray of comfort and consolation into the hearts of other exiles.

To accompany the waltz on his nightly round of inspection through the factory, blazing with light and yet full of fantastic corners and ghostly shadows, had had a fascination of its own. Nor would Anton ever forget the dramatic scene, when in the small hours of one morning something went wrong with the process of boiling the syrup, and for a couple of hours it was uncertain if the hurriedly summoned experts could put it right.

Anton was roused from these day-dreams by the appearance of Jeannette, who asked him if he felt rested, and was ready for a cup of tea.

"The children have gone for their walk, and I want mine badly," she added.

"Let us have it out here," he suggested.

"What a capital idea!" she exclaimed. "Fancy, we have never thought of that before. What a groove we must have got into! Well, what do you think of Soewinogro? A good deal bigger than Tjileduk,

isn't it? And here Govert is his own master—that's the nice part of it."

When the tea was brought, and they were seated, Anton said to himself, "Now is the time for my secret to be told."

CHAPTER VI

“**D**O you know what made me decide to take my leave now instead of waiting till next year, as was my first intention ? ” he began.

Jeannette's hand stopped automatically in the act of dropping a lump of sugar into the cup in front of her. Her grey eyes looked amazement at the idea that anyone able to pack up and be off to Europe should need a special inducement to do so.

“ I should say because you want a change. You must have grown sick of your *rimbu* (jungle) by this time,” she answered.

“ Not at all. At least, not in that sense. Except for the special reason I am going to tell you, I was in no hurry to get away from Takalar. I was in an exceptional position ; I enjoyed my work, things were going to my satisfaction, the worst of my troubles were over. The Governor was content ; he endorsed my proposals and backed me up at headquarters. It was on his recommendation of course that I was officially recognised as the man who had given the district a new impulse and put an end to the state of chaos it had been in for years, before the annexation of Goa. The old chap—he told me so himself—was frightfully sorry to lose me. And I was sorry to go ; I could have

stayed on another year with pleasure. Time flies when you are busy, especially when you love what you are doing."

"Then what in the world made you give it up? It is not every day——"

"One finds the task one likes? Quite so! I am just coming to the reason. Can't you guess, Netta, dear?"

"Guess? How can I? Tell me quickly."

"I am off to Europe—to *be married*. What do you say to *that*?"

She fell back in her chair and gazed at him incredulously. Apparently the announcement did not altogether please her.

"*You?*" she gasped.

"Who else, and why not? I should have thought you would have been the first to applaud it."

"Oh, I am delighted, of course," she hastily said.

"Only I can't think of you as married. I shall have to get used to it. I remember how in Koenig, five years ago, we discussed the question, and how fiercely you attacked poor me for my antiquated notions; how you tried to convince me that marriage, given human nature, was an absurdity, except in some very rare cases."

"For heaven's sake," he cried, "don't rake up all that old nonsense! Thank God, I have travelled far since then!"

"Well, it has made me look upon you as a confirmed bachelor. And not only for the things you said, but for what you are. Will you be satisfied with one woman for the rest of your days? Frankly, I doubt it. Your

intentions may be good, but the day will come when your temperament will run away with you. You are not exactly vain, but you have had too much personal success to be proof against temptation. You like to make an impression because you are able to make one—to be loved and admired by every one. Plain, regular, married life can never give you that. You can get appreciation, but admiration, variety, novelty—no! and I am afraid you will look elsewhere for what is denied you at home. Believe me, Tony, marriage is a perpetual compromise between the things you want and those you cannot get! You have been accustomed to *take* what you wanted and to do as you pleased, as born bachelors always do."

"My dear Jeannette, are you really inferring by this tirade that I am so mentally missnapen I may never have a wife and family like other people? Think what you are saying and what it would condemn me to! If you are serious, why not tell me straight out that I am a heartless, selfish brute?"

"Nonsense!" she hastily said. "You are one of the nicest men I have ever met. If you were not my brother I might fall in love with you myself. I only meant that I would not marry you. *Pas si bête que ça!*"

"Thank you! It is a charming way of expressing your appreciation. And why, may I ask, would I not satisfy your requirements? Because once, in my salad days, I advocated free love?"

"The idea! My dear Tony, again I am not judging you by your theories. I will even go so far as to agree that there was something in much of what you said.

You opened my eyes to a great deal though you left my views as a whole unshaken. Men are polygamists by nature, was one of your statements—well, I am afraid you are right. But all the more reason to train yourselves in self-denial and devotion to duty. Once you know what your instincts are, why not set to work to tame them ? ”

“ You would take a mothers’ meeting by storm ! ”

She paid no attention to this sally, engrossed as she was by her own trend of thought.

“ Men are divided into two categories,” she went on, “ those who are able to master that kind of thing and to live up to the task of making another, as human and imperfect as themselves, happy, and those who can’t. The one lot are born for marriage, the others not. Before making one’s choice one has to know what one is doing ; but once made, the only way is to stick to it and be satisfied with the best the other party has to give, without looking elsewhere and imagining that some one else might offer something better ”

“ My dear girl, all this is quite beside the point.”

“ How do you mean ? ”

“ Of course I know as well as you do that some of us are by nature content with what we have, while others wreck their lives by always longing for the unattainable. This is not peculiar to the sexual relations—it is of general application and as old as the hills. But in matrimonial matters, take my word for it, I am more practical than you think. As I said before, I have travelled far I have quite gone over to your side. It is no use shaking your head, my dear, for it is so. In your opinion I am still the dreamer, the fantastic,

amorous youngster of old days, who ran after chimeras and fell in love with the first woman who took his fancy! When you last saw me perhaps there was some truth in the picture. But the past is buried, Netta; a new Tony stands before you. I have suffered more than you think, but all that is so much gained. I have found out the value of things in my solitude; my whole conception of women has altered. I have come round to your views, believe me. The things the right woman can give me are now exactly what I want, no less and no more: a quiet, regular life, a comfortable peaceful home—and I am prepared to do everything to get them. My loneliness has begun to weigh upon me; it is a burden that only a woman of our class and race can lighten. Only she can fully understand us, make our surroundings congenial, look after our interests as her own, share our views, our likes and dislikes, our ideals and ambitions, and be the mother of our children."

"Amen!" Jeannette said, with a touch of sarcasm. "And what have you to give her in return?"

"I shall make her as happy as I can."

"That you can only do by *loving* her. Are you prepared to love her for the rest of your life, to the exclusion of every other fancy? That is the question."

"Of course, if into the bargain we love each other like anything, life will be glorious."

"You talk as if you might do without it. My experience is not a wide one; I love Govert and he loves me, but, judging from what I have seen of other people's matrimonial affairs, unless you do love each other *deeply*, you end by finding you can't get on at all.

Then, any loneliness is preferable to the other's company. It must be perfectly awful to have to live together in that close intimacy if you are not entirely devoted to each other, if there is even a possibility that some one else would suit you better ! ”

“ Aren't you trying to protect my future wife against all sorts of imaginary dangers ? ”

“ I want to see *you* happy, that is all.”

“ You are afraid that, left to myself, I shall make a terrible mistake ? ”

“ I think it my duty to warn you. Considering that you are supposed to be asking my advice——”

“ Dear, dear, how touchy we are ! Be a little logical, old girl ! What do you think drives me to Holland, if not love ? Who said I was not in love already ? ”

Jeannette looked at him in great excitement. Her eyes lit up as she queried eagerly :

“ Then there is some one ? ”

Anton nodded, pleased at the effect of his words. “ Aren't women delightful ? ” he mused. “ The moment the personal note is struck they are ready to let their most cherished views go by the board ! ”

“ I am as good as engaged,” he announced. “ That's what is taking me home. She insists on my coming, to be quite sure of what we are doing before making it public. Is that not prudent and wise ? ”

“ You mean to say, you proposed by letter ? ”

“ Of course ! She is in Holland.”

“ But how could you fall in love ? ”

“ I am going to explain that presently. Give me another cup of tea.”

“ First tell me—who is she ? I suppose you did

not get in touch with her by advertising ? " Jeannette laughed, taking his cup from him.

" Funny you ! You remember those people in Arnhem, who lived quite near us, on the Rhine quay ? The father was a widower and there was one daughter. She was a friend of Pauline's. Well, if all goes as I expect, in another half-year——"

Jeannette stared at him without seeing him, trying to recollect.

" What was her name ? " she asked.

" Annie Hartog."

" Annie Hartog ? Of course. She was tall and dark, and when I knew her wore her hair in plaits. Well, I never ! But she was only a child ! "

" She is twenty-eight now."

" But look at the years since you have seen her. On your own showing, when you left Holland, she was only eighteen ! "

" You are a clever reckoner. Well done ! It's a year on to ' sweet seventeen,' anyway."

" Whatever made you think of *her* ? You did not care for her then, did you ? And since——"

She stopped abruptly, and began to pour out the second cup of tea he had asked for.

Anton pressed his lips together. This she did not see ; but conscious how painful the allusion to that terrible Batavian love-affair must be, she tried to repair the blunder by a move that only made it worse.

" In the meantime," she said, " you have been engaged to Bess Wiltens, and in love with two or three others."

Hardly had the words left her lips than she regretted

them. But he took them more philosophically than she expected.

"It's a mercy Bess threw me over and married de Lange. I forgave her that long ago. I was a poor candidate in every sense of the word. Good Lord! what would have become of us? In her heart of hearts she did not care a button for me."

"And are you sure Annie does?"

A treacherous red dyed Anton's cheek.

"Perfectly certain, bless her!" he exclaimed. The expression on his face grew more serious than ever.

Jeannette saw the blush, and noticed the tone of his voice. Her doubts as to his being in earnest began to fade away. In reality she was anxious enough that he should reach the harbour of refuge that marriage meant to herself, and responding to his appeal for sympathy she said in a whisper of emotion:

"Tell me all about it. I am sure I shall like her, now that I know she cares for you! But don't walk up and down like that, it makes me nervous. Sit down, and let me hear the whole story."

CHAPTER VII

HE did as he was bidden.

The story might easily have been told in a word or two ; but, anxious to make it perfectly clear that the great change in his views and habits was neither limited to his professional interests nor yet a thing of yesterday, Anton chose to give it at full length.

The old, irresponsible Tony was really dead, and the proof of this would be the narrative of how Annie Hartog had become the one woman in his life—how the idea that she and she only could give him the happiness he had always longed for had grown into a conviction as solid and firm as a rock. Surely this last great affection was something quite different from and superior to other feelings that had swayed his heart ! In spite of the thousands of miles that lay between them, of the many years since he had seen her and the fact that in those days he looked upon her as a flapper and nothing more, she had succeeded, without a move, without a single inviting gesture, in bringing him to his knees, in making him feel he had renewed his youth with all its buoyant hopes and certitude.

This was the gist of the tale to which Jeannette sat quietly listening, her beautiful face a little pale

and tired, but her eyes full of interest and understanding. Once or twice a smile trembled round the corners of her mouth, causing Anton to redouble his efforts at convincing her how deeply he was in earnest, painfully aware as he was that his enthusiasm must seem exaggerated to his listener. A similar moment of confidence, when he had spoken his heart out to this same sister to unburden it of the crushing weight of *another* love, came forcibly back to him. He put it resolutely aside, and the disagreeable recollection faded away.

It had been their younger sister Pauline, he began, who had played the good fairy and brought Annie and him together. About a year ago, in reply to a letter in which he had complained of his loneliness and his inability to forget it in his work, she had told him straight out he was a fool. Why did he not marry? And in the same breath she proposed to help him to find a wife—a European, of course, well-educated, charming, refined. *She* knew of a girl who would suit him to a T, who had refused some good offers, was still much admired, was only twenty-seven and—a dear. A personal friend of her own. Couldn't he guess? Someone he had skated and played tennis with before he left home, though then she was very, very young.

Of course he had not taken this seriously, though much amused by Pauline's sudden interest in his matrimonial affairs. The romantic note had always been strong in her, and to him she was still the "kid" he remembered. He did not even bother to try and think who this wonderful friend might be. She had

lots of friends, and he had skated and played tennis with any amount of them.

But as to the desirability of his marrying, he quite agreed with her. He was by no means the bachelor incarnate some people took him for ; on the contrary, he was by nature a family man. Now, and not for the first time, ever and anon to himself he repeated Pauline's question. Why not ? Why not have a wife and a home of his own—a proper home and not a miserable surrogate ? That would give him a new interest in life and a purpose a hundred times more poetic and attractive than his official career could ever offer him.

So, playfully, he told Pauline to do her best for him and to enter him as her first client at the matrimonial agency she had evidently started. If she was successful with him he would recommend her to others !

But Pauline had not been joking, as her answer showed. Her methods did not lack originality and boldness.

" I meant Annie Hartog," she returned. " A girl in a thousand—but that of course you must find out for yourself. Why not write her a line or two and tell her something of what you are doing ? She has not forgotten you, take my word for it ! If you want some pretext, May the ninth is her birthday. You remember you did write once, the year after you went away. I happen to know that she has always kept your letter ! "

There was the starting point from which everything had followed ; for, however silly he called himself, he actually did what he was bid and wrote to Annie on her

birthday. From her reply he gathered that she was really touched and not a little surprised perhaps by the revival of their old friendship ; a regular correspondence sprang up, and before six months had passed he took his courage in both hands and, on the strength of a growing sympathy that was perhaps not yet love but contained all the elements of a deep affection, asked her to become his wife.

It was nearly three months before her answer came, and when it arrived it did not satisfy him fully. She was pleased and surprised and flattered by his proposal ; she had always liked him, she wrote, but before pledging themselves they must think the matter over. Marriage was so final—he would understand her hesitation. As soon as possible he should hear from her again, but he must give her time.

To him this seemed a hard demand. For the moment it cooled his ardour ; but on second thoughts he felt he could only appreciate her motives and tell her again and again that he loved her and would not be happy till she was his own. Gradually a certain reserve that had characterised her letters melted, and she confessed she cared for him very much indeed ; so that he felt justified in proposing they should be married by proxy* and that she should come out to him in the beginning of the year. To this, however, Annie decidedly objected. She could never be married like that, she said ; next year his leave was due—let him come to her. They could then meet freely, make their engagement public, and have the wedding from her home.

* In accordance with Dutch law.

"You can only be sure I am the woman you really want when we have met again," she wrote ; and he was obliged to accept her decision.

"But of course," he told Jeannette in conclusion, "this is only a formality. For I know for certain *she is the woman for me.*"

When he had finished dusk had fallen, and the view from the back veranda wore an entirely different aspect from that of an hour ago. The mass of factory buildings to the left now stood out against a sky even and dimly lit—a dome of chiselled steel, reflecting a dying fire. Three or four stars were already shining ; and in the south, half-way between the horizon and the zenith, floated the moon, softly glowing, illuminating a landscape eminently peaceful and primitive, like those in the background of a Bellini or a Correggio.

"My dear—I am so glad, so thankful," said Jeannette unsteadily, breaking the involuntary pause that followed Anton's final words. "For some time now I have known you had found your way out of all your troubles. But if you have found the right woman as well——"

Getting up, she kissed him tenderly.

"What is this—tears ?" he asked, greatly moved himself, as, in the dimness, his lips touched her cheek.

"Oh, only my foolishness. It is not sorrow. But I feel so deeply—and everything agitates me nowadays. Fancy you big, strong man with your generous, warm heart, safe at last in the keeping of one who loves you ! I have been so afraid—life is so hard on those who do feel deeply !" Then, smiling : "How unutterably silly you must think me ! But Tony," and in the gathering

darkness she tried to look into his eyes, "is this as sure as you say?"

"How often do you want me to repeat it?" he impatiently exclaimed. "I suppose I know my own mind—how I long to meet her, how every thought goes out to her?"

"Have you her portrait?" Jeannette asked softly.

"Of course, here," and he touched his breast pocket.

"Wait a moment. I will see it presently. We don't want the light on now."

He nodded comprehendingly.

"What a pity this did not happen in Holland, ten years ago!" Jeannette went on after a while.

"In Holland," he said, impatiently again, "she was only a child and I—rather thank God for the delay."

"You might have got engaged, and married later. She might have come out to you."

"And that is just what she has refused to do!"

He rose and paced the cemented floor.

"My life would have been different," he said; "that I agree. But I should have missed a most valuable experience, which is, I suppose, what you are referring to. When I came to the East I was a boy, a dreamer. Since then, life has hit me hard, but it was necessary, by Jove! Ten years ago I was not ready; now . . . and Annie is just the sort to appreciate a man who has been through the mill—in fact she has said so, more than once, in her letters."

"What—have you told her about that Batavia affair?"

"Of course not!" he ejaculated sharply. And then

more quietly : " Why should I ? A thing that is over and done with. I have lived it down. I have suffered, I have paid for it dearly. You know that as well as I do. But it is dead and buried."

" I am only too glad to hear you say so," Jeannette answered rather meekly.

" Was not my proposing to Annie sufficient to convince you ? " His tone was still aggressive.

" Of course, of course," she responded mechanically.

He was clearly dissatisfied, but she volunteered nothing further. He waited ; then, with a shrug of the shoulders as though to shake off something unpleasant, in his ordinary voice he added lightly :

" It must be getting beastly late. What time do you dine ? "

" Half-past seven," Jeannette replied ; and the confidential moment was over.

CHAPTER VIII

NEXT morning, at sunrise, Anton found Govert in the front veranda, already dressed and having his coffee with a short, strongly-built man whom he introduced as his chief engineer, Mr. Dirksen.

"Sorry I can't take you to the station and see you off," Govert greeted the new-comer. "We are still in the same beastly fix with the new engine. I'm bound for Modjokerto, taking Mr. Dirksen with me. The manager of Gempol is a friend of mine; they have an installation very similar to ours that works all right, and he says if I come over he will set it running for me. The man from Solo is no good; the only way to get to the bottom of the trouble is to see a similar engine working. So I have to leave you, old chap, to get yourself away. Very glad to have seen you! Jeannette will look after you further. Don't miss your train—9.15 sharp. They are punctual to the minute nowadays. Give my boy in Holland a hug from me—tell him to do his best; and as for yourself, have a good time! You don't need me to tell you how!"

An emphatic handshake closed this speech, unusually long for him; and Govert, followed by his employee,

ran down the steps. Waving his hand, he shouted : "*Bon voyage !*" and disappeared round the corner.

"There he goes!" Anton reflected. "Always busy, always in action, a perfectly running machine himself. Where does *his* enjoyment of life come in, I wonder, and how in the world does Netta stand it?"

He could almost pity his sister, not so much for the actual fact of the prosaic life she had to lead, and in a tropical climate, as for the submissiveness that was the keynote of her endurance. Why did she not rise in revolt, claim her right to a more comprehensive, wider mental horizon, and give Govert the very necessary shaking-up in the form of a salutary shock, by reminding him that she was an individual with an entity as distinct as his own, that her love had to be won, not taken for granted? Women, he thought, are curious creatures. If ten years ago Jeannette had not broken off her engagement to van Eelde, would not her life have been a hundred times fuller and richer? A man with van Eelde's gifts would have appreciated her ever so much more than an automaton like Govert. It was humiliating to realise that her beauty, her charm, her innate kindness were wasted on an individual fundamentally incapable of ever valuing them to the full. How different his own life with Annie would be! How many hours, *all* the hours he could spare, he would devote to making her absolutely happy!

His lengthy explanation to Jeannette of his love—how it had swept away the last remnants of a conception of life in which pleasure came first and confrontation with one's self was a thing to be avoided—had

not only left him greatly relieved, but had given a new impulse to his growing tenderness for his fiancée over the water. It painted the coming holiday in rosy tints. An immense gratitude filled his heart. Life stretched out invitingly before him.

He had drunk his coffee, and, too lazy to move, settled himself comfortably in his chair and lit his pipe. Sending up puffs of smoke into the cool morning air he contemplated the panorama before him, the elevated position of the house offering a wide survey of the neighbourhood. The spacious white gallery, marble paved and with whitewashed walls and pillars, seemed to lose its huge proportions ; it became simply a window opening on to the wide world. Anton felt as if he were alone on earth, and face to face with Nature.

The outlook here was wider and finer than from the back veranda, especially now that the scenery, refreshed by the interval of night, seemed more itself, more open to communion with the human mind. The landscape stretched out in delicate hues of grey and blue and green, limited to the right, free and boundless to the left and in front of Anton. Not only the rose garden below, with its ghostly flower pots arranged in squares as if soldiers on parade, and its straight foot-paths in between, not yet fully lit up to aggressive white and yellow, but an immense pit in neutral tones, was in shadow—miles and miles of undulating ground, as far as the eye could reach, lay wrapped in the dew-besprinkled veil of dawn and spread out before the spectator.

Far away a group of bamboo stood out like a body

of cavalry, its feathery crowns powdered with gold-dust, its lance-like stems losing themselves in the pale-green mystery of the leaves. The mass of downy warriors leaned against a roof-line of native dwellings, the contour of which would have been indistinct but for the lighter tint of the fields behind. A tiny column of vapour, hardly moved by the morning breeze, rose above these primitive shelters of primitive men ; while a small stream, with as yet not a streak of silver on it, wound its way between low, cone-shaped hills and hurried behind a wood where it became invisible, but betrayed its presence by the rushing of water, falling in large quantities from on high, restless, without hesitation or afterthought.

To the south was an immense plain, a sea of bluish green, faded by long wear and patched with dark bunches of trees and bare solitary hills, standing forlorn and motionless, as if they had lost their way and remained there, stranded. Here, on the horizon, was another mighty volcano, but this wore a *panache* of smoke—a continual reminder to the mortals busy in a perpetual endeavour to lay Nature under contribution that her moods cannot be relied upon, that the respite allowed poor humanity is never more than an armistice, not a final peace.

To the east the outlook was effectively barred by a group of cocoanut trees, bordering the road by which Anton had come, and a long line of brownish buildings of a material that at once suggested cheapness and jerrymandering, though the effect attained was neat and graceful in its way. They were separated from the manager's private grounds by an open space

covered with grass, and enclosed on three sides within rough fences; part of which was occupied by a cemented tennis-court, a greyish cloth spread out upon the green that served as a meadow for the two cows, of a strongly degenerate Dutch breed, whose province it was to supply Govert's household with milk. The milking hour had already passed; and the calves, after being separated during the night from their respective mothers as is the Eastern custom, had just been allowed to rejoin them, and were endeavouring to satiate their hunger with whatever of the fluid was left.

In this row of houses that turned their backs on the meadow, the diminutive mosque—a wooden *langgar* with no other claim to distinction than the funny little turret in the centre of its square, peaked roof—was a prominent feature, though its importance was not a little dimmed by the Chinese shop at the corner, which had just opened its *bilik* shutters to a large number of native furnishers carrying huge baskets and evidently anxious to sell their miserably cheap contents to the Celestial who stood gesticulating and vociferating in the doorway of his shabby emporium, quaintly swelled into a shapeless mass by the profusion of sheds and annexes around it. The front bore a large inscription in Chinese characters, between two immense red pennants, indicative of the presence of a bride in the house.

Anton watched the scene with dreamy eyes, attracted not so much by any special detail as by the picture as a whole. It is the same, he mused, with oriental landscapes as with oriental faces: lines are lost in the

mass, outstanding features almost effaced by the general evenness of colour, individuality finds no expression in the monotonous surroundings. An almost sickening absence of revolt, resistance, character, is seen in both ; an abject submission to the inevitable that is often not inevitable at all.

Sometimes, in the years that lay behind him, he had made his peace with the oppressive *Kismet* of the East, exemplified either in humanity or in the landscape—but oftener he had felt a disgust, an aversion, a fear rise in him, lest the far-reaching tentacles of this monster ever hovering in the background, the Octopus of Inertia and Indolence, should again seize and drag him to its featureless abode, where no ideals, ambitions or aspirations can survive. Now, with the certainty of a new life before him, in a cool, refreshing climate, amidst the fellowship and bustle of a European home, the surrounding Eastern calm seemed harmless and innocent, it gave him a friendly, congenial smile. Little emotion and sparsely sown tokens of a past experience were to be traced on the broad, untroubled countenance he sat and contemplated—no picturesque monuments of tradition, no vivid colour met his eye.

Everything seemed drawn on broad, horizontal lines and the whole pervaded by a tendency to absorb and be absorbed, to leave and be left in quietude ; all that was loud and harsh, all self-advertisement and self-assertion to be carefully avoided. It was an ideal setting for a soul inclined to lose itself in thoughts that neither gave pain nor satisfaction, which went as they came, leaving no trace behind them ; but just for that reason, how irritating and disheartening to

the man of culture and action, to the proud inhabitant of the West, though he had only come here to amass the means to better his lot in the land of his birth and with the intention of returning thither as quickly as possible! To him, the East is devoid of life except for the ideas and energies imported by himself and his fellow-Europeans: a dead land, notwithstanding its marvellous vegetation; an island lost in the immensity of the Pacific and isolated from the outside world, where Nature reigns supreme, unwilling to strike a bargain with human genius, and indifferent to the troubles of poor humanity.

A dead land, and yet there were sounds in the air, however faint and rarely swelling to that chorus of many voices: the clamour of workshop and traffic Anton remembered so well and that was now calling him from afar.

Here silence seemed the watchword and noise an intrusion, yet every now and then the lonely listener caught some notes on their way from the distance: some came from behind the hills, weak, yet traceable to their hidden sources; others from the group of native houses near by, abrupt or indistinct, yet always discernible. A few were gay or hard—the majority deep and melancholy.

In spite of the early hour some looms were already working, their shuttles clanking. At intervals the little bells that heralded the end of a woven line tinkled, as if typing on a large scale were being done.

The nightly barking of the *desa* dogs, that pestilential sound to which only the native ear is hardened, was over. The hellish performers, jackals rather than dogs,

were doubtless sleeping away a few hours of their miserable existence in some dark corner, among the rubbish and offal cast away there.

The emphatic call to prayer, recited by an invisible monitor and sent forth from the mosque before sunrise, in warning, haunting tones that soar high above sleeping humanity, had subsided too. Now the moslemin were being called together by the beating of a drum, which at intervals struck the air abruptly, in angry, impatient groans that sounded like : Come, Come, Come ! or in double beats, less fiercely and more persuasively : Come on, Come on ! Each time, between the strokes, could be heard from a village *en fête* in the distance a native orchestra or *gamelang*. This affected Anton as a murmur of monotonous complaint, enlivened at intervals by higher tones of a stirring spontaneity, but with a note of false gaiety in them ; such airs as must surely have been played centuries before the appearance of the European on this primeval stage, conveying the seductive sadness, not so much of individual, human sorrow, as of an everlasting suffering imposed upon the land itself. There was a note of eternity in the lament. It seemed equally to bewail the transitoriness of adornment and pleasure and the immutability of existence ; at the same time glorifying the centennial age of the soil, and the adventures it had lived through, eons before the birth of Man. It hinted at feats and fates performed and decided long ere the present race of mortals found articulate expression of their wants and wishes, though vaguely conscious that the mainspring of their every feeling had its origin in these very happenings

of old. Most oppressive in its fatalistic conclusion that man's every endeavour to shape his own lot is a cardinal sin, the melancholy song summed up the essence of the East, on whose millions fatalism has such a hold that the lonely European feels more and more of a stranger in a crowd, which refuses to hope, and shuns responsibility.

Here birds seldom sing, as though the gods despise the praise of their feathered creation. But an ear practised in the chase might catch in the distance the shriek of some diminutive waterfowl, disturbed in its earliest raid upon the ricefields.

From the belt of green that embraced the village close by came the lusty crowing of cocks; and from gaily decorated cages hung in the trees the cooing of pigeons, in timid whispers, neither sad nor gay, of little prisoners grown accustomed to their fate—a note of resignation in perfect keeping with the general tenor of the scene and with the idiosyncrasy of the natives, whose light brown figures failed to add the least touch of life or individuality to their surroundings.

"In another month I shall be in Europe," Anton said to himself half aloud. And he emptied the contents of his pipe, all ash by this time, into the gigantic flower-pot that stood beside him.

CHAPTER IX

"GOOD morning! Had your coffee?" came Jeannette's voice, putting an end to Anton's meditations.

"Rather! an hour ago. That is one of the things I shall miss when I get home: coffee, freshly roasted and ground, and made as we make it here. A drink for the gods!"

"Grand, isn't it? I love it too."

Going to the table she laid down a parcel from under her arm, and took the steaming milk-jug from the head-boy who followed her.

"Here is my parcel for Gerard," she said presently. "I hope it is not too big for you and not too small for him. Do you think you can find room for it in your portmanteau?"

"Don't bother about that, old girl! It will tuck in somewhere, and once on board . . ."

"Oh, Tony, is it really true that you have to go in another hour or two? Can't you manage to stay a little longer? Wire to van Eelde, and tell him he is not to expect you till Friday. The *Juliana* does not sail till Saturday afternoon! No?" as he shook his head. "Is it quite impossible?"

"Quite, I am sorry to say. I should be only too

glad to stop on. I don't seem to have said half I had to, and there are piles of things about yourself I want to hear. All the same . . . what can I do? Let us be reasonable, Netta! I *must* be in Batavia the day after to-morrow. I have a lot of shopping, and several people to call on. Really, two days is not an hour too much. Besides, I can't disappoint van Eelde. You know we have just renewed our friendship after the years of estrangement. You remember how we quarrelled and why."

"I know, I know. It was all *my* doing. I shall not say another word. It was foolish of him to turn his back on you because I found I couldn't marry him, but very human, though you had never anything against him."

"On the contrary, I always wanted you to have him, and when you threw him over——"

"You took his part and were very cross with me. You backed him up strongly then, but I suppose by now you think differently?"

"It all depends. I still believe——"

"That he was the man for me?"

"That you would have made a splendid couple, yes. But as things are, it seems rather silly to discuss it. It's another of the past and gone affairs. If you had not broached the subject I should not have thought of raking it up."

"I don't mind in the least," Jeannette said. "It is all so long ago. Looking back, I can hardly believe it happened to myself."

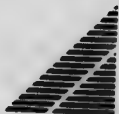
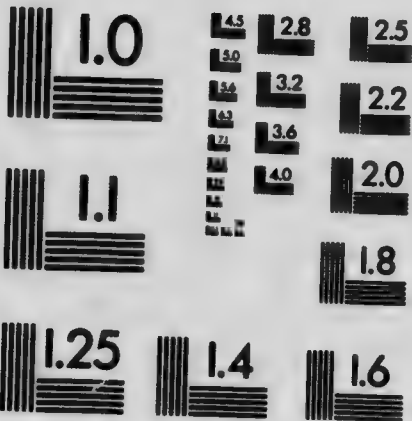
"I suppose you are perfectly happy as you are."

"Of course!"



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"One should never take happiness as a matter of course! There should always be very good reasons why one is or is not happy," Anton told her.

"And you doubt if I could produce them! Don't you realise that Govert is everything to me?"

"The difference between him and you is so colossal! Now van Eelde——"

"Oh, please don't drag *him* in again!"

"I thought you said you did not mind."

"I don't, in a general way, but I do object to your comparing him, or any man, with Govert."

"Can you avoid doing it yourself?" her brother said tentatively.

"If you want to know, Govert is miles and miles the superior."

"You don't mean that!"

"Indeed I do."

"Will you tell me why?"

"You don't like Govert. You can't make head or tail of him. He is so entirely different from yourself that it almost hurts your *amour propre* that I, your sister, should love him. It took *me* a long time to understand him. Perhaps, when I accepted him, he was not exactly the lover of my dreams, but I cannot remember the time that I have not been thankful for what I did. My love for Govert has grown and grown, while whatever I once felt for van Eelde has completely died out. He is a very attractive and even brilliant man, but I shouldn't like him as a husband: in the first place, he thinks much too much of his own precious self—he can never put another in front of it; in the second, he is never sure of himself. You know that as well as I do."

"He is an artist, and cannot be judged from the ordinary standpoint."

"Thank you!" dryly. "Then, as a companion for life, he would not in the least suit me."

"And you think Govert is *not* selfish?"

"In the real sense of the word, no. He is heart and soul in his work—in fact he overdoes it. He is not very sociable, and a poor host, but he is brave and dependable, he stands up to life and makes it serve his ends. With van Eelde it is just the other way round: life has to make him. He is always on the look-out for something better than he has got, and in the meantime is dissatisfied with everything."

"Did you reason all this out before you broke off the engagement? I did not know you were such a marvellous judge of character!"

"Have you never heard of a thing called *instinct*, and that we women possess it to a very high degree?"

"It is what you all lay claim to. Rubbish, I call it."

"Ask your Annie, and she will tell you it was the self-same instinct that made her accept *you*."

This seemed unanswerable, and there was a moment of silence. Jeannette poured out her coffee, while Anton started rocking violently backwards and forwards in the chair into which he had thrown himself. For the moment all he could do was to smile ironically, as if to say that his case was quite different from his sister's, and far above her comprehension. Emptying her cup, she put it down and said:

"As to van Eelde, I feel very sorry for him. He must be so lonely now that his wife is dead, and his little

son in Holland—like Gerard. I am delighted that you are friends again. He is such an interesting man—you must promise to tell me how he is."

The allusion to van Eelde's bereavement started Anton on an entirely wrong tack. Did Jeannette resent his having consoled himself with another? Was this the basis of her hard opinion?

"I wonder if you would think as badly of him as you seem to do, if he had remained unmarried," he ventured to say.

She gave him an indignant look, but vouchsafed no reply.

"You are right, I was talking nonsense. Think no more about it," Anton hastily went on, seeing his mistake. "He will be delighted to hear of you. I shall give him your kindest regards, of course."

"No, that is just what you must *not* do. If you mention me at all, let it be in general terms, and if he asks you now I am, tell him I'm all right, nothing more."

"Hello, what's this? It's not like you to be so careful and ceremonious. The thing is such very ancient history. Can't you two forget it and be friends?"

"The question is . . ." she stopped and blushed. "I am not so sure of him as of myself. I had a letter from him, a most foolish letter, about half a year ago. If I tell you, you must promise me never to say a word to anyone, and above all never show him you know anything about it. He is not likely to start the subject, but, if he does, you are absolutely ignorant. Promise? All right! Now, listen. When his wife died, in July,

he sent us a printed announcement. Instead of answering it in the usual formal way, for Govert as well as for myself, I followed my natural impulse and wrote him a few lines, expressing my heartfelt sympathy. I felt touched that he should have remembered us, and asked myself why, after all these years, we should not be friends again. That was my sole motive, on my word of honour. Maybe the tone of my letter was just a little too warm, and the fact that I did not say much about his wife—for the simple reason that I did not know her—made a wrong impression, but I never dreamt my words of condolence would evoke the answer they did. Fancy his being so indelicate as to write me back a long account of his married life that, I heard for the first time, had been wretchedly unhappy. Fancy his telling me, *me*, that he had always been sceptical as to whether his wife was suited to him—that having failed to secure the woman he loved, he should have remained single! He as good as reproached me with having driven him to marry 'anyhow,' as he called it. No wonder I felt painfully confirmed in my opinion that in his eyes he is always right and others always wrong; that whenever things go against him he has no rest till he can accuse some one or something else of being the cause of it. His letter hurt me dreadfully. I burnt it and left it unanswered, but it haunted me, and I had to keep it to myself, as I did not like to worry Govert."

"But he did not say——"

"That he still loved me? No, not straight out—but he insinuated it, which is worse. He made it appear as if he and I were closely intimate—as if I

understood him, while his wife had never done so. In addition, he said things *en passant* that, however flattering, were under the circumstances an impertinence. I do not choose that he should write love letters to me, letters I cannot show to Govert. The mean thing was that, on the face of it, it was all quite right and proper—it was when you read between the lines. Had I taken him to task he would promptly have assumed an innocent air, and it would have been poor me who would have had to explain where the offence lay."

"Extraordinary!" Anton said, not quite knowing how to keep pace with Jeannette's indignation. He tried a conciliatory tone. "Is it not just possible that you saw in it something more than the writer intended? And do you make sufficient allowance for his feeling bitter and lonely, and forcibly drawn to you, the only woman he has ever really cared for?"

"You speak as though I were free. You think very lightly of that kind of thing, I know, but wait till you are married yourself! If an old lover wrote to Annie in that strain, what would you say, I wonder?"

"I would rather you left Annie out of it. Besides, if anything of the kind ever happens to her the point will be not what *I*, but what *she* will say!"

"Well, do you suppose for a moment she would like it?"

"It all depends. If the other were still seriously in love, she might feel inclined to forgive him on that score. After all, to love is not an offence, is it? How could van Eelde, when he started to reply to what you yourself own was a very charming note, help pouring

out his heart and letting you see that he had never loved his wife because of the love he bore you? Of course, if you had never written——"

Jeannette looked at him reproachfully, but Anton stood his ground. Slowly the stern expression on her face softened.

"Perhaps you are right," she sighed, "and I shall have to forgive him. But mind, not a word of this! I am almost ashamed of having spoken of it to you."

"Oh, that's all right. But supposing the unforeseen happens, and van Felde tells me he wrote and does not know what to think of your silence?"

"Yes; in *that* case—well, say that I probably thought the letter did not require a reply."

Breakfast over, just before starting for the station Anton had another few words with Jeannette, which afterwards he had good reason to remember.

"You know Marie Delmaar is in Batavia?" she suddenly asked him.

Anton felt the usual shock at the mention of the name, but succeeded in maintaining his *sang-froid*, though he avoided looking at his sister as he answered simply:

"I know."

"Are you prepared to meet her?"

"I have not contemplated such a possibility." This was not absolutely true, but he said it as if it were.

"If it happens, what will you do?"

"I can easily avoid her."

"I am not so sure. Batavia is not so very large. Besides, she will have seen your name in the Gazette, and will be on the look-out for you."

"What nonsense!" he exclaimed, though the suggestion made a stronger impression than he was willing to admit, even to himself.

"Much better be prepared."

"I thought I had already told you the whole thing is over and done with!" he cried almost fiercely. "I don't care a brass farthing what she thinks or does. If I happen to come across her, it will be as a casual acquaintance, nothing more."

"So you think it rests entirely with *you* to decide on what terms you will be?"

"Of course!"

"Supposing she does not accept your off-hand methods and, figuratively speaking, jumps at you?"

"I shall turn tail and run away."

However serious the subject, Jeannette could not help laughing.

"You dear, big baby! A nice figure you would cut! You will, of course, do nothing of the kind. Your only chance is not to care a rap, to let her see your feelings for her are dead, dead as a door-nail, and have left no trace of bitterness behind. You must make it quite clear that the whole affair is a flirtation, nothing more."

"You forget she knows, as well as I, that there is no such thing. How am I, the man, to take up an attitude as if there had been nothing in it? It simply can't be done."

"Do you prefer her to think you love her still?"

"Of course not. The idea! But between that and——"

"A moment ago you were ready to ignore her.

Be a man and not a small boy ! If you do meet, show no fear, no nervousness, no sentiment of any kind. Don't be soft, but cool and self-possessed. Why spare her ? She has never spared you. She used you as a pastime, a plaything. Here is your chance. Give her the lie, once for all, if she flatters herself she can still upset you and let you dance to her tune—make it quite plain she is mistaken, that you laugh at the idea. Have no consideration, Tony, for a woman who played you false from the very first—you as well as her husband, and the others who took your place as you took Delmaar's ! ”

“ All right, then, I will not run away ; but I will not run after her either. I will leave it to Fate to decide,” he said with a forced smile. Jeannette was so hard on Marie ! It was the same attitude she had always taken up in the old days—that Marie was the most to blame ; but even now he was not prepared to think of his old love as Jeannette would have him. “ The laws of chivalry——” he resumed, after a moment's pause.

But Jeannette did not let him finish. “ Chivalry ! ” she exclaimed. “ Show it to her, and you are lost ! ”

“ I wish you would not speak of her like that. She is not so bad as you make out. To hear you, one would think she was a regular out-and-outer ! ”

“ She is as bad as she can be.” Seeing, however, that her brother would stand no more, Jeannette went on : “ I only mean, if I were you, I should not consider a casual meeting a thing to be dreaded. All depends on your own feelings, and as you love Annie you should be perfectly safe ; so won't it be better,

both for yourself and her, that you should see Mrs. Delmaar as she is now? She is five years older than when you knew her, and has lived hard in the interval, from what people say. You, too, are very different to what you were then. Look at her with your man's eyes, a man who has found himself and made a name to be proud of. After all, *her* attitude matters nothing, it is what you think of her that counts. If you stand the test, if you ascertain for yourself she has no power to move you, that not a vestige of the old love remains, no harm will come of it and you will be free to go to Annie. If, on the contrary, the old feeling is not dead—well, you will know better than I what you have to do."

"So you don't believe the thing is over!" Anton exclaimed. "How can I convince you?"

"Your word will be enough—but your word *after*, not *before*, the experiment! When you have seen Mrs. Delmaar and can tell me she is nothing to you I shall be satisfied. Send me a line before you sail, will you?"

"But supposing I don't meet her, and your wonderful experiment does not come off?"

"*You will meet*, take my word for it."

"Again your precious instinct, I suppose?"

"Precisely, my instinct. And a little knowledge of my own sex in addition. Do you really think a woman of her stamp would allow you to go by unnoticed, or rather without noticing her? She will have another intrigue on hand, but that won't stand in her way. She will find some means of seeing you. Think how much more worth her while you are! I don't want to

make you vain, but you are, so to say, famous—you have been for weeks in the limelight, your portrait has appeared in the papers. She will of course claim her share of the glory. Be prepared, my dear—as the French saying is: *Un homme overti en vaut deux!* "

"How you do hate her!" Anton involuntarily exclaimed.

"I do, though 'despise' would be a better word. She never loved you, never. She is a make-believe—rotten to the core. If she had really cared for you I could have forgiven her twice the suffering she has caused you. As it is, I detest her kind and her!"

"So, so!" said Anton sarcastically. "It certainly takes a woman to show up another, but I'll bear in mind what you say."

CHAPTER X

IN Java there is no night service on the railways ; the trains only run by day. On the Batavia-Surabaia line one express starts every morning early, from Surabaia, in the East, and another from Batavia, in the West, to meet that same evening at Maos in the centre of the island and continue their journey to the reverse points of the compass at the break of dawn. Besides this delay of a whole night, the express stops fairly often on the route. The number of passengers from one terminus to the other is comparatively small, so that a non-stop train would not pay. The many taken up and set down, in the course of the journey, have to help cover the expenditure.

At Maos both trains are inevitably cleared of their human cargo. In the gathering dusk the weary travellers stream out of the station, free to study the social status and available accommodation of a spot upon which no traveller ever sees the sun shine.

The sole feature Maos has in common with more famous and bigger places is that it, too, was born of necessity and the fitness of things. There all comparison ceases. In the Portland cement, corrugated iron, and dried mud it is built of, it loudly proclaims :

"I am nothing but a shelter for a single spell of darkness; if it were not for the railway, you would not find me here at all."

But let all unacquainted with local conditions dismiss from their minds the vision that has been probably called forth of one of those centres of human activity in the Far West, sprung into being like a mushroom at the announcement: A railway will be built across the prairie. Here, nothing of the kind has changed the face of things. Not even the construction of the station, which has made the name Maos widely known, has had the effect of attracting private enterprise. No host of fortune-hunters, land-speculators, mining prospectors, no gamblers or cow-boys, no riff-raff, anxious to secure their share in the metamorphosis have alighted on its platforms, or even considered the question of coming. No banks, shops, or bars have been opened, nothing in the shape of advertising has been done to attract the tourist. Even at the date of the present story, ten years after the final completion of the line, no guides are on the look-out for your arrival, and you will ask in vain for picture-postcards or the best fiction.

But there is an hotel, a railway-hotel in the fullest sense of the word. So as to ensure its being there in readiness for the first applicant brought by the first through train, it was erected by the Government. The management was let out by public tender, when, tempted by a guarantee, a man was found enterprising enough to run it.

Seen from the station, the "State Hotel," as it is called, seems a sumptuous affair. At the hour of the

arrival of the trains, immediately after nightfall, its galleries, well-lit, clean, and neat, extending over a large front, float as an island of light on a sea of darkness: a hospitable oasis in the desolate Unknown. The broad wings stretch out their arms to the tired traveller, the bright eyes of numerous rooms beckon to him with the promise of rest and relative coolness. "We want you as much as you want us!" the whole establishment seems to cry, and, having handed your small luggage to a native porter, you smile at his superfluous gesture in the direction of the gaily illuminated hostelry. As if you do not already know where rest and comfort await you!

Frail illusion, delicious *fata morgana*!

Almost at the very moment that you tread the grey cement of the three or four steps leading from the uneven road to the smooth surface of the central gallery, the illusion fades, the spell is broken. Soon enough you feel a fool for having allowed yourself to be carried away by insistent bodily needs to the extent of seeing—delusive mirage!—a palace in a pile, that on closer acquaintance brutally flings its vulgarity of line, its coarseness of material, its absolute indifference to your opinion, at you. How bitter is the deception! It was only the distance and the artificial light that lent it its attraction. At close quarters the pretence is dropped of even a conventional welcome. The hand was tendered to grasp your money, not to solicit your approval.

These sinister forebodings, so suddenly awakened, prove only too well-founded. You speedily find yourself the victim of the Spirit of Crude Necessity and

Wretched Limitations, which is the real presiding genius of the place. It leers at you round every corner. It steals behind you, along the well-lit yet gloomy passages. It isolates you from your fellow-sufferers, a crowd of strangers lost in a cheerless void. It accentuates the bareness of the room allotted you. You formulate a wish. It sneers: "What you want is not obtainable!" and when you say: "I will not stand this, I shall go!" white with rage, it bars your passage, hissing: "You shall not! You have no choice—you have to stay!" The ghosts that haunt old romantic, historic buildings are awe-inspiring, but not half so terrible as this phantom of to-day. It is not past misdeeds it conjures up for you, but the awful things to come. It lays its clammy hand on the immediate future, making it dark, hopeless, and repulsive.

Step by step, in the further course of your acquaintance with this singular guest-house, you become aware that more disappointments lie in ambush, trivial enough, but when occurring with methodical frequency a source of impotent rage. They try your endurance and pluck in adversity; they put to you questions as perplexing and unanswerable as the problems of life themselves. Why, for instance, in the name of Satan, is the iced water you ordered not even cold? Why, notwithstanding your frantic ringing, does the boy whom you told to clear your bed of mosquitoes, so that in the night you may find some rest, not return? Why is the tea stewed; and when, after threats and curses, another pot has been procured, stewed still? Why is only tinned milk supplied, the thing you most abominate? Why is there not sufficient light *inside*

the room? Is it possible that the sixpenny mirror, nailed (half a foot too low) to the whitewashed wall, is the only thing you have to shave by? Is the face reflected in it really yours? If so, why has it become so green of hue since last you saw it in another mirror?

Dinner brings no change in your mood, it is only a new form of annoyance and neglect. The soup is like water, the meat poor, the chicken tough, the claret you ordered to deaden your sufferings undrinkable. It has a metallic taste, looks disintegrated, poisonous. No wonder—the bottle has been days and days in the refrigerator.

Slowly you realise the truth—that, given the circumstances, the outcome could hardly be otherwise. The Maos State Hotel is no ordinary hostelry; abnormal conditions have bred abnormal results—the Maos caravanserai works on lines of its own. In other hotels, when the butter is rank or the coffee adulterated, the waiter lazy or the clerk uncivil, you have it in your power, should all attempts at redress or satisfaction fail, to take refuge in the ultimate means of cooling your temper and avenging yourself: you ask for the bill and depart to a rival establishment. At Maos you can do the first, but not the second. There is no other place to go to; nothing but the humblest lodging-houses that feed on the crumbs left by their big brother and are patronised only by natives and the lowest class of Europeans. You would land from the frying-pan into the fire.

It is but a question of one short night, you try to console yourself—all too short when you sleep through it, but in Maos this is difficult of achievement. There

is, of course, no premeditated action on the part of the management to prevent you slumbering. If you can find some well-earned rest, after the protracted journey in the train and in anticipation of just such another journey on the morrow, well and good. They provide you with a room and a bed, and at a relatively early hour the lights are extinguished. Now poor, tired creature, sleep as long and as deeply as you can !

But it is just in these nightly hours, usually devoted to quiet and repose, that the Maos hotel seems to wake up to a new, unnatural life. Few of the guests realise that in the daytime the place will be as empty as a school during the vacation, that here the day is not made when the *sun*, but when the *moon* shines. The moment for work is now. Before the nocturnal visitors depart they must be provided with another meal, however sketchy ; bills must be made out, boots, black, brown, or white, cleaned, and numerous other things done, long before sunrise.

So, after retiring late, by half-past three or four the staff is up and busy. Also many of the guests, anxious to be dressed in time, take their bath an hour earlier than usual and drink their coffee on the stroke of five.

If your room is on the outskirts of the conglomeration of rooms and passages, and no friends sit outside a neighbouring room and talk, you may not fare so badly ; but in the neighbourhood of the offices and the kitchen, the noise of doors loudly shut and plates and utensils clattered down alternates with the babble of native servants—coughs and guffaws, yawns and tittering come from you don't know where. The bedrooms

—with the exception of the few in the main building, ranged in long, distinct rows—prove, owing no doubt to faulty construction, by no means so isolated as you have a right to expect your room to be; the snoring of your neighbour on the left is as clearly audible as are the words spoken in dreams, by another, on your right; few of the movements of those lying awake escape the ear of the hapless being next door, who is himself vainly trying to seek oblivion. In short, if you are not impervious to sound you are done for.

Long before sunrise the station also becomes alive and active; the engines are being made ready for the work still in store. This seems to necessitate a terrible amount of whistling, now abrupt, now long continued. Unable as you are to protest against the torture it inflicts, you cannot help regarding it as only done to pester you, and shatter your last hope of slumber. A native engine-driver is before everything a native. Like all children—and natives are little else!—he has a passion for noise. Give him a whip or whistle and he will amuse himself for hours, incapable of realising the intolerable nuisance he is to others.

No wonder that every guest is up, packing, shaving, breakfasting, and paying his bill, long before the hour fixed for the departure of his train. No wonder that the general feeling is as if awakened from a nightmare.

Yet, as you reoccupy your seat in the small saloon-carriage and glance through the open windows royally furnished with the means of protection against sun, rain, and dust, at the hotel, now empty and preparing itself for the rest denied you, you are surprised to find that as if by a miracle all resentment has left you, with

the cessation of the worry that gave it birth. It is with difficulty you realise that it was really you who passed there so many tiresome hours ; you, who only a moment ago cursed your fate and planned the most awful schemes of vengeance.

" Good-bye, Maos, impossible place ! " you mutter. " Your task is as unenviable as it is badly achieved. How shall we look upon you—as a living example of the way things ought not to be done, or as a victim to the inexorable law of nature, that lames human energy where there is neither chance of progress nor of healthy competition ?

" Farewell ! If not as friends, let it be without rancour and hatred that we part. After all, I had to come to you and you were forced to take me ; but it is over. So—good-bye ! "

CHAPTER XI

IT was through experiences like these that Anton van Weghe had to go before he was allowed to start on the second half of his journey to Batavia. But for his wakeful night it was not the hotel that was responsible. An outside event made him suddenly indifferent to his uncongenial surroundings.

He had been given a room in one of the wings, linked to the main building by an open passage with a roof of corrugated iron resting on slender columns. This room was one of the best in the hotel, sheltered from the sun during the day and looking out on to a small grass plot. Its only drawback was that another room, from which it was separated by not more than fifteen or twenty yards, with its open gallery in front, lay immediately opposite. This, however, Anton did not mind. It was only from his own gallery that he would be exposed to view ; and before going to table he did not even notice if the room opposite was occupied.

After dinner he had a talk with an English General and his daughter who were paying a short visit to Java, in the course of a voyage round the world. They had just come back from the *Burubudur*, the celebrated ruined Hindu temple in the heart of the island, and were so enthusiastic about what they had seen that they

could not help expressing their feelings to their neighbour at table, who happened to be Anton. His knowledge of English was small, but he was a sympathetic listener—for the daughter was nice-looking, and the father, for an Englishman, surprisingly vivacious. To his regret, they retired early; but, before parting, the wiry old soldier expressed the hope that they would meet again next morning, as their roads lay in the same direction and he and his daughter would be delighted to have as a companion a Civil Service man, who was, of course, well acquainted with the country through which they were to travel.

After a short stroll along the rough paths outside Anton also went to his room. Turning out the lamp that hung in front, above the marble-topped table just before his window, he undressed, put on his pyjamas, and, stretching himself in the solitary chair that stood outside, ready for his use, lit another cigar.

He was just deliberating whether or not he should have a whisky and soda, when his attention was drawn to a man emerging from the room opposite, who, stepping into the lighted gallery, followed his example by sitting down in just such another chair as he himself was occupying.

The new-comer wore a white dinner jacket and patent-leather pumps. Instead of turning out his lamp, he turned it up higher, and, unfolding a paper, settled himself comfortably to read, in the full glare of the acetylene light.

A shock went through Anton. The man opposite was Delmaar—the husband of Marie, the woman he

had loved to distraction ! There could be no mistake —though Anton recognised him more as a whole than feature by feature. He had on a white peaked cap, evidently to protect his bald head against the mosquitoes ; it threw the upper part of the face, including the eyes, into shadow, but there could be no mistake ; the way he held his paper, and, with outstretched hand, nonchalantly tipped the ash from his cigar, or, at another moment, caught the end of his moustache between his lips and chewed it, at once identified him, as if it were not five years but only a day since Anton last saw him. Any vestige of doubt vanished when the unseen observer heard him call out an order, in the sharp, well-articulated tones he knew so well, typical of a mastery of the Dutch language acquired in the Indies, not in Holland, the Motherland.

For, though of pure European descent, Delmaar was born and brought up in Java, going to Europe for the first time when he was already eighteen. The double influence of climate and Eastern surroundings could the more easily be traced, as he was by nature gifted with exceptional ability in one particular direction ; he had a good dose of commercial genius, inherited from his father, who had been one of the leading merchants in Batavia, in the days when the Suez Canal was first opened. But as if to counter-balance these advantages, he was in his views and ways a typical *sinyo* (half-caste), not in blood but by association. He had no sense of humour or philosophy, and, except in his business, none of proportion. He lacked insight into human nature and was awkward and slow of understanding in his dealings with his

fellow-men, while his attitude to women was decidedly that of an oriental.

In the sunlit East, with its contempt for individual aspirations, its indifference to facts, and its monotonous routine, the finest qualities of the mind have small chance to develop. Unable to value and love chivalry and delicacy for their own sake, by instinct, Delmaar could never be admired or loved himself; and though in the business world he succeeded fairly well in maintaining himself on the level of his father's high position, he lacked social gifts and was never popular. His marriage to the beautiful girl he chose had proved a failure; and when, in the early days of their acquaintance, Marie gave Anton to understand what a bore and a brute her husband was, he was only too ready to believe it. When their intrigue reached its crisis, and Delmaar, instead of attacking him outright, chose the more diplomatic way of threatening to tell his chief if he did not at once request to be removed from Batavia, Anton felt confirmed in the bad opinion he had formed of the injured party, and any scruples he may afterwards have felt, as to his own conduct with respect to him, were easily quieted by the merciless judgment: Serve him right!

And now he was again face to face with the man he had so despised. Delmaar, of all the people in the world! Delmaar.

The suspicion that his fancy must be playing him some trick was immediately rejected. Nor could there be any question of a premeditated act. Chance had brought Delmaar here; he must have arrived in the

train from Batavia—probably bound for Surabaya, where his firm had a branch office. There was nothing supernatural or even unnatural about it. Anton only wondered that he had not noticed him at table.

He tried to look upon the encounter—which should not lead to a personal meeting if he could help it—as a trivial affair, yet from his safe coign of vantage he stared at the reading figure as if it had been a phantom, pointing with an imperious gesture to the Past. With painful surprise he began to realise that this past was not so dead, not so safely buried as he had thought it, or how could the mere sight of Marie's husband thus upset him? Why else this satisfaction at feeling himself safe from detection; why this overpowering instinct to avoid all contact with *this* particular man?

He had once done Delmaar the cruellest wrong one man can do another. Strangely enough, it came home to him in this instant more keenly than it had ever done before. How was it that now he could not behold the victim of his fault without remorse, when, in the days of his guilty relations with Marie, and for years after they were broken off, he had always been able to despise the husband and silence his own conscience? Bewildering questions, until he found what seemed a satisfactory answer: Because his love for Marie was no longer there to blind him to his responsibility for the havoc he had wrought in Delmaar's life. Whether or no the reports of her latest behaviour were true, *he* had been the one to lead Marie astray. Delmaar was perfectly justified in looking upon *him* as the chief destroyer of his happiness, as the first to come between his wife and himself.

Then there was the other thought that Anton had long succeeded in putting from him, but that rose up and confronted him as he watched the reclining figure in the veranda opposite. A recollection so tormenting and humiliating that he could hardly repress a groan.

Delmaar, the insignificant figure lying there, had once inspired him with a deadly fear—the mere remembrance of which made him shudder—a fear that had seized him at a terrible moment, paralysing all his faculties. This happened a few days before the truth had actually leaked out, through some one, the native coachman probably, telling the master what had been going on during his absence, between his wife and the young *Controleur*.

Never had Anton succeeded in eradicating the scene from his memory, when, in the hour of night, in the very midst of their caresses, she and he were aroused by the noise of a carriage abruptly halting in front of the house. Delmaar had been away for two or three weeks, a period of feverish happiness to the enamoured couple, who, first hesitatingly, then to the full, indulged in the freedom left them. He was not expected back for another week or so; but in that dread moment it seemed certain he had cut short his trip in order to surprise them!

In those awful instants of suspense, which seemed an eternity and yet demanded the promptest action, Marie, with a suppressed cry of "Henri!" had sprung to her feet and run to the door that led to the front-gallery, while he stood, unable to move, panic-stricken at the idea that now, at once, he would have to face the injured husband. There was no way out—

he was caught like a rat in a trap. Terror shook him, yet it was neither fear for his life nor for the result a surprise *in flagrante* could not fail to have on his future prospects that wrung his soul, but the insufferable thought that he was in the other man's house. On Delmaar's entrance he would be lost, would stand before him like a culprit overwhelmed with shame, unable to find a reply to the thundered words: "You scoundrel, what are you doing here?"

It was Marie who, after a vain attempt at piercing the darkness outside through the slatted door, rose in so far to the situation that she pushed her lover to the window on the left and awakened him from his momentary torpor by whispering in his ear: "When you hear his step on the veranda, jump down into the garden and try to get away, while I let him in!" How plucky she had been and—how she had laughed at their stupidity, when the carriage went on without any maturing of the dreaded moment. It was some time before he realised that it had been a false alarm, caused by some stupid driver who had evidently lost his way—but he had been unable to join in Marie's merriment. Though he felt like one reprieved from a certain death, through that terrible minute of suspense, that agony of deepest self-contempt had spoiled the happiness she had given him, and sent him home with the feelings of a thief caught in the act, and only escaping punishment by some incredible chance, some inexplicable interference of Fate itself on his behalf.

He never forgot the terrible lesson; and, though his love for Marie proved strong enough to survive the shock received, he had henceforth abstained from

paying her midnight visits, though Delmaar stopped away several days longer.

Anton felt an immense relief when, having at last given up his vain attempts at finding rest, and rising at an hour untimely even for him, he managed to get his bath and breakfast without the meeting taking place that he was in dread of. As he returned from his early ablutions he had seen a hand push open the venetian shutters before the window opposite; but the wire half-blind hid all but hand and arm from view. From his own room, equally protected, while finishing his toilet he kept an eye on the enemy's movements. By the time he saw him appear, in his pyjamas, a towel over his arm, evidently bound for the bathroom in his turn, Anton was already packed and dressed; so, taking up his portmanteau, he hurried to the dining-room, where he was the first to be served with food and to finish and get away. Without further ado he walked to the station, though it was still three-quarters of an hour before his train was timed to start. He found it waiting, on the left, in readiness for its passengers.

The train for Surabaia, on the right, which he expected Delmaar to travel by, was ready too, so Anton decided to take his seat at once in the saloon-carriage of the Batavia express, to avoid being seen on the platform. He could easily while away the time by reading a paper, and was just looking round to ask where one was to be bought, when a native servant, carrying a bulky valise, glanced at him in passing, in a way that made him instantly glance back. Their eyes met, and

the man involuntarily halted, an expression of surprise and hatred on his face. Though it was the affair of a moment, his attitude was so unusual and insolent in one of his race and station *vis-à-vis* a European, that Anton looked sharply at him, and felt, together with the sudden shock of recognition, that he too was plainly showing his disgust and perturbation. It was Amat, in the old days Delmaar's coachman, now evidently promoted to be his valet and to accompany his master on his journeys.

The lines of a native face, indistinct by reason of the dusky, sallow complexion, leave no decided impression either on the negative of the camera or the retina of the observer. To a European all natives are superficially, to a certain extent, alike; a prolonged contact with the individual is indispensable before he can be singled out in a crowd of his compatriots with any degree of certainty. Generally speaking, a close personal intercourse between those of the ruled and those of the ruling classes in the colony either does not exist, or, when it appears to, is only on the surface. Anton, in his official position, had much to do with natives; but it was only under special conditions that even he was able to retain the more or less vague traces left on the remembrance of the white man by one of these millions, with whom he has so little in common. *This* particular face, however, he had good reason to recognise; to him its pitch-black eyes were full of special meaning, these sombre features he would not easily forget. In the days when he was a frequent guest at the Delmaar's house he was always instinctively aware how Amat suspected and hated him.

These feelings had evidently lost nothing of their former malice. His leering, furtive glance, the smile of contempt which, however incredible, was plainly there, were strongly associated with bygone memories.

Amat had discovered the truth long before Delmaar, and had promptly shown his resentment ; probably out of jealousy, for he adored his *Njonja* (mistress). That the creature should chance to meet him on his way to Batavia and dare to emphasise the fact, was inexpressibly mortifying to Anton's *amour propre*, as well as unfortunate with a view to possible complications. For the meaning of Amat's sinister look was clear. It was as threatening as it was insulting—Anton could have shot him for that look alone ! In the fraction of time during which he took stock of an enemy, whom he could neither crush under the weight of his contempt nor hope to convince that his present journey West had nothing to do with his former love, he endured the torture of an insufferable verdict. And the terrible thing was, he had brought it on himself ! The fact of this worm daring to crawl into his path, and, in its mute but efficient way, reproach him as well for old, long-redeemed errors as for intentions he did not foster, was an additional punishment for the blow once dealt by himself at Delmaar's honour.

Involuntarily Anton bit his lip and clenched his fists ; then, assuming an air of indifference, he stepped into the carriage. Here, finding himself alone, he paced up and down the small saloon, in a nervous endeavour to cool his anger and relieve his feelings.

Suddenly he stopped and burst into a laugh. " What

a fool I am—attaching so much importance to a silly, trivial incident ! I won't think of it again."

He settled himself down, and fell to regretting having been in such a hurry to dismiss Wongso. If his boy had been there he could have fetched a paper and generally looked after things, and the meeting with Amat might never have taken place. It was an awful nuisance to have to pack and do everything yourself. On board and in Europe you could manage, but not in the tropics. He had been an idiot to let Wongso go !

CHAPTER XII

THE train had nearly finished its daily task and the day itself was far advanced, when Anton entered upon the last stage of his journey to Batavia. It seemed ages since the six carriages, drawn by the small, strong engine, assisted for the most arduous part of the road by another, had climbed the Bandung plateau, the elevated plain, immense and circular, surrounded by peaks and extinguished volcanoes that extend in all directions round Bandung, the capital of the *Preanger Regentschappen* (counties).

The scenery was, for the greater part of the way, magnificent, and entirely different from that through which he had travelled the day before ; the atmosphere had been pleasant and exhilarating, except for the dip into the valley of Tjianjur, where the lower level renders the air hot and stuffy. But the iron road ascended mountain sides again, boring through enormous piles of rock and embracing others ; and the heat of early afternoon had been tempered by the stores of cool, fresh air that even a tropical sun is unable to exhaust, accumulated as they are between hills and tops, in crevices and dells.

Sukabumi passed—the charming holiday resort

that revived in Anton's mind some pleasant recollections—another lengthy descent began, but in the meantime the sun had lost its fiercest glare.

At the beginning of the journey—which was like a fanciful glide through ethereal, nebulous matter in the earliest morn—and during the subsequent cinematographic display of towering heights and valleys, the saloon was full of people, including Anton's chance English acquaintances. With the old General he had a pleasant chat, and exchanged much interesting information; while the daughter pleased him by her wholehearted admiration of the glorious scenes as they rolled along. But the couple left the train before noon, bound for Garut, lying a little off the main line, in the lap of the mountains.

At Bandung more passengers alighted, and, no fresh ones getting in, Anton found himself at Sukabumi the only occupant of the carriage. He welcomed the privacy thus afforded him, stretched out his legs, and tried to get a little nap. But it did not come off, and for the rest of the journey—two or three hours still to while away—he sat thinking and dreaming, as he did not want to read, and sleep was denied him.

The impression of the Delmaar incident, however unpleasant, had already faded; viewed from a little distance it lost its sinister significance. Even should Amat have told his master that he had seen *Tuan Controleur* van Weghe—what did it matter? And yet Anton had not long been left to himself before that old love affair began to haunt him—this time in another form and, curiously enough, without any relation to the recent encounter with the husband. Now it was

Marie herself, the vision of her personality, that emerged and refused to be dispelled. He called himself a fool, he swore she was nothing more to him, that the Past was the Past—all in vain! He took refuge in the ultimate remedy of conjuring up Annie's image, in order to convince himself, by placing them side by side, that there was no comparison between the two women. Annie was noble, full of character, charming and attractive, unless his own vague memories, her latest portrait, and Pauline's enthusiastic accounts should prove misleading. She loved him—that was another point! Marie had never cared for him enough to give up everything for him—or indeed anything that mattered; the favours she had bestowed had not occasioned any real sacrifice. She was frivolous, an accomplished coquette, a woman with a past—for, in addition to the scandal connected with himself, she had been the talk of Batavia two years ago, when the names of, first Koster, a naval man, and, after him, van Lee, the managing director of the Factory Company, had been coupled with hers. Public rumour had it also that these intrigues had been something more than mere flirtations; and, when Koster was found dead at the bottom of a gorge near Garut and everything pointed to suicide, there seemed but one explanation for the deed. Proofs there were none—but Anton for one *knew* to what lengths Marie could carry a love-affair. She had been unfaithful to Delmaar for his sake—how could he condemn her for that? But—what about the others?

It took him some time to discover the reason of this sudden resurrection of the past. Then, with a jerk,

he sat upright in his seat. "Of course," he said aloud, "it is because I am going to Batavia, and know that she is there!"

He began by scouting the idea. It was his desire to meet his old pal, van Eelde, that made him curse the slow progress of the train, and look forward to being in Batavia again with such alacrity. The other was all nonsense.

But while thus internally arguing, Marie's image became more and more distinct; she even seemed to smile at him, to tease him for his silly efforts to veil the truth: that she—she and not another—still reigned in his heart!

Anton became quite angry with the stupid, weak, illogical creature in him that threatened to throw him back into the terrible quandary of old. "You will not succeed, you fool!" he said, between his teeth.

But his protest was of no avail. His thoughts became more and more entangled in the dreaded skein—it imprisoned him, in defiance of his better instincts. "And after all—why not? Why not give in, just for a moment?" came a soothing, tempting whisper. Yes, why not? Why not confess that, at the time, his feelings were of such magnitude, such unforgettable splendour, that he was bound to come upon their traces, now that he was returning to the spot where they were first awakened, where he had indulged them to the full?

"If you have grown so wonderfully strong," the voice went on sarcastically, "if you have really conquered yourself in your wilderness and purified your affections by smashing the old idol and putting a

worthier image in its place, why let the few embers that remain from the old fire trouble you, when the moment you really wish it you can always stamp them out? Why not admit your natural excitement at revisiting the scene where this fascinating woman once reigned over you? What harm can it do to breathe the same atmosphere again, which once endowed you with new hopes and aspirations? These are now dead—just so; but then, why shrink from them? What a proof of weakness! Why take precautions against an influence that will disappear like smoke, when faced with cool determination? Come, give in! Think of her, and the old days, at your leisure. Only so can you come to a perfect understanding with yourself. Your sister Jeannette was right: you owe it to Annie; and it will set your heart at rest for ever!"

It was not immediately that Anton lent his ear to this inner voice and gave in as it bade him. He tried to ignore the tempter by fixing his attention on outward things—and if this effort could have availed him anything, the sight of the majestic *Gedeh*, rising stately on his right, should have sufficed as the distraction he so much needed. All pain seemed of less account and the daily round a small affair, in the shadow of this imposing figure, glancing down, from its towering height, on poor, struggling humanity. Graceful curves, clad in mauve and green and palest blue, with dark patches here and there of solitary sycamores, lifting their mighty forms high above all other growing things like kings in a visionary panorama of the ages, sloped in perfect rhythm from the lofty summit. The giant's crown was still ablaze, his lower lines were wrapped

in mystic gloom, suddenly broken at his feet by a mighty stream, now appearing, now lost to view, that pushed its foaming way through a vale, crooked and tortuous as the streets of an ancient town.

The arrival of Buitenzorg brought a more effectual distraction. Anton espied an acquaintance, Barneveldt, one of the officials from the much dreaded Central Office, the *Algemeene Secretarie*, which sends out its tentacles over the immense area of Netherland's India—a bureaucratic camarilla more powerful than the Governor-General himself, and in permanent and direct touch with the wire-pullers in The Hague.

Barneveldt was now a big man, very solemn and important; still, on seeing Anton, he at once walked up and cordially shook hands. This, from him, was a personal compliment, a recognition of Anton's late achievements in Takalar, hall-marked as they were by official approval. His last words, before hurrying away to welcome a still greater luminary arriving by a train from Batavia, were significant and gave his hearer much amusement.

"Remember me to van Gogch when you are in The Hague," he said; "you know he is Minister now. He is an old friend of mine."

Anton accepted the mission with a smile. He had already made up his mind that, once in Holland, he would religiously shun any contact he could possibly avoid with the official world. As one who had to put adopted measures into practice, he had his own opinion of most of those who ruled the colony with so high a hand. All the same, Barneveldt was not a person to offend, so he said:

"All right, old man, I won't forget."

A passing glance at the houses and gardens scattered round Buitenzorg, which the train, making a last effort, quickly left behind, and Anton dismissed the residence of the highest authority in the land from his brain. Again no one had entered his carriage; he was still alone—with himself and with his thoughts.

Persistently the old vision returned and held him.

It was half-past five. In another hour they would reach Weltevreden, Batavia's main station.

The day was drawing to its close. Not only did the light take on a new character, but the scenery through which they ran had completely changed. Here no hills—with the rice-fields dammed up against their slopes, within muddy walls, the irrigated surfaces lying mirror-like or as carpets of bright young green under the stare of the sun—no woods, clinging to rocks and filling clefts, as if all hard lines were strictly tabooed.

Now Anton's gaze wandered widely over slightly undulating rice-fields, with no predominant features to relieve their monotony and break their melancholy sameness.

It was still day and even warmer than before; the nearer they drew to their destination, the more sultry and oppressive the atmosphere became. All the heat of the passing hours seemed to have gathered on the northern strand, the low-lying plains that, three centuries ago, saw the advent of the Dutch, and compelled them, against their will, to settle and become the lords of the land.

They glided on through the lifeless landscape. But the sky glowed fiery, passionate, above it, where the

sun hung in a molten yellow haze, burning, in anger, as the inspiring heart that refused to resign without a last, long struggle.

The wide expanse began to reflect a wondrous colouring. Gold and crimson, violet and pink, blue melting into green—every rainbow hue was there. Behind a mass of woolly clouds, piled pure pale silver one upon the other, red lines stood out against the tenderest silk—like a verdict written in blood. A few seconds more, and the sentence was wiped out, in violet that slowly cooled to purple grey.

Gold and yellow were laid on evenly ; red, purple, and violet in bold, deep blocks, as in a drawing from a master's hand. The sun sank lower and lower, had nearly reached the horizon. An ever-changing scene of form and tint, a feast of shades, an endless play of light charmed the spectator. But a play, a feast that, however entrancing, was powerless to arrest the growing certainty that day was doomed, that night was nigh.

Now, from an unseen source, rose a veil of lacy clouds, first rosy red, then orange, then gilt all over, with delicate outlines as on finest porcelain. The glowing disc dropped down behind it ; then the fiery rays streamed out again, dazzling, wild, in agony.

The landscape was bathed in a fairy brightness that flickered on the window panes of the moving carriages and on the polished rails ; it set trees and shrubs in flames, as though dipped in liquid carmine ; the magic light gave the earth, in spite of its wrinkled features, a tender expression, a dreamy smile. A white house on a hillock in the distance sprang into prominence as in a vision.

What a chaos of gold and brown, of light and gloom was flung over the soil—what sharply-defined contours, what contrasts, what intervening chasms! Here it was as if a gigantic plough had been at work; there some level ground rose slightly, as though the better to watch the final scene that sky and earth were waiting for.

Then—a quick change.

The wide plain seemed to shrink in size, as if invisible hands were slowly rolling up the furthest end from view. Shadows gathered from all sides; till the arena, where the last struggle would be fought, was bereft of radiance.

Darkness lay hidden, collecting its forces for the deadly spring. There was no sound but the noise of the train, and yet a sense of strife was in the air. Nature held her breath, waiting, motionless, for the inevitable issue. Slowly, surely, the hour had come—the sun sank below the horizon.

The tiny cloudlets, where he had disappeared, still glowed with a rosy and reflected gleam, like delicate, slim fingers, pink and transparent in the lamplight. The purple sky soon faded to violet; grey curtains closed softly; a strange, unreal light hung over the *sawahs*—and all was over.

In the East the cause had been lost even sooner. There the defeated day lay conquered, exhausted, dead. Night had crept in stealthily, like a murderer, with sure and certain hand and merciless steel.

His cold embrace was swift and fatal. Without a sound all nature sank and expired at his approach; as a drowning man on the wide ocean throws up his arms and disappears from sight.

Oh, the sadness of gathering darkness in a far, foreign land—the anguish that invades the soul for the inevitable! Something weeps bitter tears in us poor mortals, faced with the fight of life with death: a conflict that there, especially, fills us with terror.

For a time shall surely come when we too shall cling convulsively to the fast fading gleams of light, and the mantle of life that is slowly slipping from us.

Till, suddenly, all will be silent on the field of battle; despair will come to an end, strife and struggle cease. With fixed eyes and blanched lips we shall lie down and wait; and life, our day, well-fought or wasted, bright or sombre, will lie behind us—a dream that is dreamt, a thing that is no more.

CHAPTER XIII

WATCHING the sunset, Anton sank into a deep reverie. The spectacle of the encounter between light and darkness that he had witnessed, though not directly claiming his attention, pervaded him through his sub-consciousness, and, serving as a background to his reflections, provided a fit accompaniment to the melodious theme that compelled his feebly protesting heart to yield up its deepest secrets.

"Marie!" It was long since he had spoken the word with that tender, loving intonation. But he had lost his self-control.

The moment he let himself go—far beyond the realm of visible things, his thoughts flashed to her, a million times quicker than the pace at which *he* could ever travel. At one bound they covered the distance between now and then and, landing him gently in the midst of scenes and sensations he had for years been able to ignore, with a commanding gesture shut out all that lay between.

Before he knew what was happening, Marie had become the central figure in a series of visions, bright or sad, evolved, one after the other, from the maelstrom of former days. Reinstalling herself in the

place of honour, on the throne once occupied, she beckoned to him, the bewitching smile on her lips, the world of desire and promise in her eyes he so clearly remembered. The winning gesture bade him follow her, as, preceding him through lofty passages, she tapped at the door of each secret room of the dream-castle they once lived in. And the portals immediately swung open—those very doors he had decided should be kept hermetically closed for ever !

He stood up, and walked restlessly to and fro. The blood mounted to his temples ; he felt his heart beat to suffocation.

He leant his elbows on a window-ledge. The evening breeze had sprung up and, increased by the rapid movement of the train, forced him to keep his head inside. A cloud of smoke floated continuously by, with glowing vitals where it emerged from the funnel. The engine seemed to be pulling harder, with impatient tugs, as if it too longed for the end of the journey—for Batavia.

He sat down again, at the other side of the carriage, and put up his legs on the seat. Now to think of her !

He closed his eyelids to hide the outer world. He saw her before him, so distinctly, that he refound her sphere : the atmosphere that, buoyant and intoxicating, ever surrounded her.

Reason deserted him. He forgot every good resolution—Annie, Jeannette, everything. Batavia ! Batavia ! he would soon be there, where she breathed, and lived, and loved him. He had only to speak, and she would be his again. That, since those halcyon days, she had carried on intrigues with others—what did it

matter? she would never have looked at anyone but him, had he been with her. She was unhappy in her marriage, and because she could not have her heart's desire she had made a mess of things. To her, love, admiration, were a daily necessity—how then expect her to live a spotless life, while Life spelt misery?

Was there ever a being like her, in imagination or reality? His sight grew dim as he pictured her—the poise of her small proud head, and her great dark eyes. Wonderful eyes they were, questioning, childlike, but full of meaning. She could make them sparkle with wit, or gleam softly and tenderly, as she pleased. They dropped, and the long lashes lay on her cheek—then all at once she would look up with an expression so self-confident and mischievous, that he had an overmastering impulse to seize and subject her to his will—forcibly if need be—till his passion melted into helpless longing, under the influence of a single modulation in their glance. And this woman had been his! Oh, he must, he must see her again before the *Juliana* sailed! And in a flash he remembered—Delmaar, just now, was not at home!

Her coquetry had often wounded him. Once, twice, no, several times in the midst of their happiness she had played with him, without necessity, just to tease him. But when he tried to reconstruct her differently—he failed.

She was fond of money and nice things; as a jewel, she demanded a rich setting. She claimed, as a matter of course, the greatest devotion and indulgence from her surroundings—it seemed to him impossible that she should ever ask in vain.

In character she was rather weak than steadfast, and morally, perhaps, not beyond reproach ; but did not that deserve pity rather than contempt, alone as she stood in the world, with no strong hand or feeling heart to guide and comfort her ?

Their first meeting ! Not the first time he saw and spoke to her, but the hour their souls met, and mutually proclaimed : I am yours and you are mine !

He had dined once or twice at their house and felt impelled to repay the civility by inviting her and Delmaar in return. Before that evening he had found her a striking personality, attractive, piquant, and anxious to know more of him ; but it was on the night she was his guest he made the discovery that he loved her and that she loved him.

He had ordered dinner at Versteegh's—in the lofty room upstairs. He could still see the small round table, enclosed within screens ; with the candles in their pink shades and the delicate colouring of the flowers. After the meal was over he went home with them, to sit and talk for a while longer. That one hour had been decisive.

He and she turned into the front room, her boudoir, while Delmaar went to the back veranda to read the pile of letters brought by the post in his absence.

She opened the grand piano, a present from her husband on her birthday, and without waiting to be asked played all the pieces : the Largo, the Moonlight Sonata, the Eroica, that on a previous occasion her listener had mentioned as his favourites. She was an accomplished performer, and he stood beside her, lost in dreams. At a certain moment she touched him

lightly on the shoulder, repeating a question he had not even heard. With a shock, he came to himself. The look he gave her contained a world of bewildering thoughts, of desires for which there were no words; and the lips that had just smiled at him remained parted, with an expression of wonder and delight, as if to say: Can it be true?

Silently she sought out some music and began to sing, and again she chose songs she had heard him praise: "*Il sforzo del Destino*," "*Ninon, que fais-tu de la vie?*" She had a soft, deep voice, well trained and delicately expressive. One passionate high note still echoed in his heart, after all these years.

He felt that she sang for *him*—a direct appeal. He had a moment of suspicion—it seemed so prearranged—but was immediately convinced it was only natural that she should wish to please and win him. Were they not alone, not only in the room, but in this beastly materialistic India, two poor human souls, each craving for a sympathy eternally denied them? If she were seeking him as he was seeking her, all the better, the more wonderful and glorious!

She told him what lived and hoped and strove and cried in her; he did not wish to comprehend, to investigate or weigh it. Her sublime confidence required complete acceptance.

He could have wept for happiness. He had never liked Batavia; he felt stranded in the East; his work he had hated since he became conscious of the fact that its terrible monotony would never change; he had suffered agonies of self-reproach for his growing indifference, his morbid incapacity to accept things

as they were ; and here—in this moment, he felt his despair and disgust had been a shame, an insult to Life's amazing possibilities. He had not lived in vain, not endured these years for nothing. Here was an angel on his path. All he had gone through led to her, was the preliminary to entering Paradise. It was as though cool bandages were being laid on wounds, miraculously closed but aching still—as if the immediate past, so useless and colourless, would soon be blotted out, forgotten.

Leaning his arms on the piano he had stood and gazed at her, his heart in his eyes. That she should allow him to face her thus and, without breaking off, continue to pour out more and ever more of her hopes and longings, as though desirous to give, give, give, without stint or limit, was in itself a unique favour, assuring him that his worship, suddenly born, was as suddenly accepted.

When at last she stopped and the silence that followed seemed laden with the bewildering consciousness of intimacy he took a step nearer. Her eyes were cast down. She rose and faced him. Then she looked up. That glance he could still feel. Here he at once found peace and rest—here was the happiness he craved for ! They gazed into each other's soul, forgetful of everything.

For how long ?

How long did he, weary traveller, bathe heart and mind in the cool depths of those wondrous eyes ? For how long did his pain, his unrest, his despair require the touch of those limpid waters, to be healed for good ? Was it for a second, or an hour ? Or did an instant

suffice to explore, as in a dream, the territory thrown open, the kingdom nervously waiting to acknowledge him as lord?

From the back veranda came the sound of a glass being put down on a marble table—Delmaar, of course, still busy with his letters. For the moment the spell was broken. Reality took its place.

But while she closed the piano and put her music together he still lingered beside her. She turned, and laid her hands in his. He held them, quietly, solemnly.

"For ever!" he had stammered.

"Well, you have managed to amuse yourselves a long time!" was the only remark her husband made when they went through to him.

Another picture: the first time they had kissed.

It was a strange experiment. It happened in the morning, a week or two after the dinner at Versteegh's. On his way to his bureau he called in to see her, on his bicycle; Delmaar had already gone to town. He brought a book as an excuse and, alone with her again, in the small boudoir—they had embraced.

It was not exactly passion that inspired him—a curious hesitation almost held him back. Was it instinct that whispered how there lay something concrete and brutal in this first step to a closer contact, this symbol of unity, which could not but impair the ideal character of their relation? Also, the clinging caress, which under other circumstances would have come as a matter of course and as inevitable, seemed forced and out of place in the cold morning light. Strangely enough, he was driven to action, not by

impulse but by calm resolve. It was expected of him. He would make himself ridiculous by waiting longer. And he was sure this decisive deed would open to him a new world—would make him older, wiser, more fit to mate with her.

At the first sign he gave of wishing to take her, she threw herself into his arms and nestled on his breast, closing her eyes. Indeed, he had not acted a second too soon! She must have thought him a fool for not doing it before. He turned up her face, which wore an expression almost painful in its intensity, and kissed her on the lips.

How sweet the touch of her—how wonderful, like the scent of a hothouse flower! True, for a moment, it was as if he were behaving against his better judgment, as if the spell she had cast over him suddenly ceased in its effect. In that one flash of a second he eyed her coldly and critically: was she as attractive as he had thought? The answer was decidedly *no*. She was no longer fresh and young—she looked faded and tired. Powder had come to the rescue of a complexion that had long withstood the tropical heat; there was gold on one little tooth, however white and even its fellows.

The impression lasted only for a moment, still it hurt him, it gave him a feeling of faithlessness, of disloyalty. Was his great dawning love, instead of lifting them both to immeasurable heights, to leave him the moment his senses invaded the new domain?

But all these doubts vanished like mist before the sun the second time his lips sought hers and felt their answering pressure. He kissed her again and again,

as though excited and relieved, as though enfranchised to a new right, as though some great obstacle were overcome, some imaginary objection shaken off. He tasted an experience he had never had before—never given him by any other woman: the whole-hearted surrender of a ripe, initiated being, whose reserve is only feigned, whose kiss, in direct reply to the desire she arouses, comes naturally, a free gift, a privilege, the more precious as the giver fully knows all she is bestowing.

Then, suddenly, Marie had loosened herself from his grasp, her cheeks flushed, her eyes avoiding his. They sat opposite each other, trying to put their emotions in order and to regain their self-command; but a furtive glance at her left him with the impression that a new element had entered into their relation, or—was it always there?

From that hour had commenced for him a period of unrest and torment, but also a new life, in which so much that had slept and would have continued to slumber in him was suddenly startled into being. A great, novel interest awoke and quickened—an interest in all creation, but more especially in her and in himself.

It was a strange, feverish world that they now entered. There was the ever-growing need of constant meetings, the insatiable desire to be together, the craving to become dearer and dearer each to the other, regardless of the pain, the ruin, the consummation of their hopes must surely bring. The haunting knowledge that shortly they must part poisoned every interview; and the cleverly contrived, seemingly

chance encounters, at other people's houses, in a shop, on foot, on horseback, driving or cycling, kept both in an intermittent fever of expectation and disappointment, of ecstasy and depression. A letter, a greeting, a short interchange of words, some verses, some flowers, gave colour to their days ; until the delight they brought had died away and reaction followed. Both counted the time by these landmarks—a certain day, spent together, should never be forgotten ! They were boundlessly superstitious, and seriously believed that unless careful to be duly thankful for each piece of good fortune that came their way such a chance would never be given them again.

But their happiness had been ephemeral, fictitious. The salve applied yesterday had to-day exhausted its healing power and had none left for the morrow—they only lived for what each new day would bring. It was the same with their letters. Scarcely were the written sheets seized and devoured than the contents were forgotten, or no longer sufficed to still the raging thirst that at once tormented the recipient again.

She often consulted him as to her relations with her husband. He would only hear of fair play, and pleaded radical measures : she must tell Delmaar how matters stood, whatever came of it ; he was ready to give him any satisfaction he required. But she must begin by keeping him at a distance. A man with Delmaar's coarse nature would never be able to realise how deeply in earnest they were, how serious was their determination to be one, unless she broke with him entirely. All sexual intercourse between the two must cease. This her honour demanded ; this, in the long

run, Delmaar himself would agree was the only course for her to follow.

She vigorously defended herself against these doctrines. Though longing for an opportunity to tell her husband everything, time was needed for such a delicate task, she said: she abhorred her ambiguous position, but anything was better than a scandal that would crush them all three—herself, her husband, and her lover.

Little by little, however, she seemed to see things from the lover's point of view. In principle, she agreed, her life with Delmaar was unnatural and abnormal, her relations with the man she adored natural and honest—the fact that he and she had proved sufficiently strong to confine their intercourse to endearing words and a few kisses was evidence enough how unselfish and noble was their passion. Would not every right-minded person think the same? This feeling made them incautious. They were tempted to let the whole world into their secret. If the only way of bringing the obnoxious third party to accept the inevitable were by means of a terrible scandal that would find its echo in Holland, among relatives and friends, well, then they would relinquish the plan of obtaining a divorce; but henceforth they were free to ignore that party's inhuman claim upon her.

They never once realised it was only on the most egoistic grounds that she feared an explanation, possessed as they were by the fixed idea that it was the unfortunate husband who played the despicable part, by standing in their way! Sometimes it seemed as if the simple, rational thing would be to go to him and say:

" See here, we have found each other—you have no other choice than to leave us to be happy together. No decent man would ever wish to force a woman whose love is given elsewhere to stay with him ! "

CHAPTER XIV

HOW painful were all the later memories ! And yet, was it manly, was it fair to her to regret the happiness she had brought him, however short it had been and however dearly he had paid for it ? The sense of having given full sway to that most natural impulse of his manhood when the opportunity offered, of having possessed, where he had desired so long, of having come to deeds, after so many empty words—was it not a thing to be proud of ? What more natural, more logical than the final issue ?

Halt ! Why blind himself with sophisms ? He knew too well he had done a triple wrong : to her, to the other, to himself. He had gone over it so often in his loneliness, and had never been able to escape from the conclusion that the thing was damnable. Why should he now, under the influence of the coming meeting, stifle the voice of his conscience ?

The coming meeting ? he repeated with a tremor. Did he wish to see her again ?—Her image rose before him, smiling, triumphant, above all his better instincts. " Marie, Marie ! " he whispered, while his arms involuntarily opened to enfold the long-lost beloved. And then he knew that while he should not

go to her, should take no steps to seek her, if she should cross his path, to-day, to-morrow, the day after, even at the eleventh hour, he would bless the fate that brought her to him!

He buried his head in his hands.

"Such is life!" he muttered. "One longing for the Illusion, the thing that never comes; one revolt against the inevitable; one struggle between reason and desire!"

With a pang he remembered Jeannette's words: "If you are still in love with her, you will know better than I can tell you what you will have to do!" And he remembered, too, what Jeannette had said of her: "Rotten to the core!" No, no! he protested, it is not love; it will never be love again! But another voice came: If not love, what is it then?

He began to notice lights on either side of the line. He shook the dust from his clothes and put his books, portmanteau, and stick ready on the seat next him.

He looked out of the window: the train was passing before some native houses, in one or two of which a light was already burning.

Would van Eelde be at the station? he wondered. Would they recognise each other after these eleven years? His friend knew nothing of the events he had been recalling—van Eelde was in those days in Medan and Padang. Unless he had been told.

The steam whistle sent out a long, piercing shriek above the high trees. European houses, with gardens in front, now began to appear. Pagansaän!—there was the level crossing he had so often bicycled over. Then another suburb—close rows of smaller dwellings.

The train began to slow down, he could feel the action of the brake. The continuous, sonorous sound of a smooth gliding over even rails was interrupted and changed to an intermittent rattle, broken now and then by the hollow echo given out by a building, or a bridge. Then a clear "Ting-tang"—the points.

A large white house, close to the line, with a group of people in the front gallery—Kebon Sirih. Now they were gliding along the well-known, high whitewashed wall, until, all at once, there lay the King's Plain, stretching away to his left in the misty twilight, bare and open, or lost to sight in the shadows beyond his view. The engine ceased its effort, one more triumphant whistle, one more "Ting-tang" and, with what sounded like a deep sigh, the carriages were slowly drawn up along the platform at Weltevreden—and the train stood still.

"Nothing much changed here!" summed up Anton's first impression of his renewed acquaintance with Java's capital.

There stood van Eelde. Anton knew him at once, in spite of his beard. The characteristic wave of the hand, his imposing figure, the somewhat ironical expression of the eyes, would have betrayed him anywhere, as would the deep tones of his voice.

Before the native porters could hurry to him, Anton sprang from the balcony, his properties in the one hand, the other held eagerly out to the friend who hastened to grasp it. They faced each other for a fleeting moment, a little awkward, with a searching glance and a smile.

"Well, well, that has been a good stretch of years!"

said the elder and stouter man. "I don't need to ask if you have had plenty of fresh air in the meantime. Your complexion speaks for itself!"

"And you are not altered a bit, except, of course, for your beard."

"With a beard or without one, you are heartily welcome. Good that you gave up the silly idea of staying in the hotel. To think that this is our first meeting in the tropics! It seems incredible. There's one advantage—we shall yarn without ceasing. And haven't you done well! Who would have expected such doughty deeds when you chucked the Law for the Civil Service! You like your work, I suppose?"

"It has grown on me; I like it, yes."

"Glad to hear it. Of course Europe will be a comedown."

"In what way?" Anton queried somewhat curtly, for he knew the answer beforehand.

"Well, here you have the glory of your authority behind you. In Celebes you were a big man—in Holland no one will look at you!"

Anton shrugged his shoulders and kept his thoughts to himself. He would be the wiser of the two, and not discuss the matter further. He knew what a sore point the civil servant's power was with many non-Civil Service men; how it was a source of continual friction between members of his corps and outsiders.

Van Eelde suggested that they should walk, unless Anton preferred to drive; his house, on the opposite side, was only twenty minutes away. And he indicated the spot, across the enormous open piece of ground outlined by trees, that was already dim with

shadows. The idea of being able to stretch his legs after the long day of sitting in the saloon appealed to the traveller ; so, after seeing to the luggage, they set off along the broad footpath at the side of the lighted carriage-road which skirts the Plain. All the while, on their left, stretched the wide, seemingly limitless area in which the buildings of the sports club and the telephone station phantastically floated, like tiny islands on a misty sea.

Van Eelde was broad-shouldered, heavily built, and inclined to be fleshy. He was two years older than Anton, but his beard and his bigness made it seem more ; also the guest, equally tall but of slighter make, walked with greater ease and alertness.

For a time each was silently busy with his own thoughts, endeavouring to find an opening for the overwhelming mass of information he had in store for the other. The question was, how to begin ; the right word once spoken, the distance of time that separated them from their University days would be soon bridged over.

"How is Jeannette? All right, I hope?" van Eelde broke the silence. The question was not unexpected ; yet Anton, remembering his sister's instructions, was somewhat slow in answering.

"I left her in the best of health, yesterday morning. She——" He was about to add, "is expecting another baby," when he suddenly stopped from a feeling of delicacy, especially towards the man whom he knew was still in love with her.

"Gave you a message for me, I suppose?" van Eelde completed the sentence.

"Of course," Anton automatically replied, "her best regards."

"She is a brick. I forgave her long ago. Though why, I wonder——"

He, too, left his sentence unfinished, and Anton in the unpleasant expectation that he was about to ask the reason of Jeannette's not having answered his letter. But van Eelde seemed to understand that it was better to let the subject drop. With a thoroughly characteristic impulse he put his arm through his friend's and gave it a cordial squeeze, exclaiming :

"By Jove, it is nice to see you again ! There are one or two decent chaps here, besides some of the old lot whom you will meet presently ; but taking Batavia as a whole not many worth cultivating. They're not a bit like you, Tony, not a bit !"

"I'm jolly glad to see you too !" he was assured. "It's rather late in the day, just as I am off home. But never mind, we'll make up for lost time and have some delightful hours together." And van Eelde received the energetic, hearty nod, which he recognised, in his turn, as peculiarly Anton's own.

From this moment the success of the meeting was assured. The conversation ran smoothly, as if the two had been separated for eleven months instead of years ; as if each had not accumulated a store of experiences and emotions unknown to the other.

Most of the talking was done by the host, who, by reason partly of nature, partly of circumstances, acted as guide. He was a brilliant conversationalist, witty and resourceful, and, once started, poured forth a flood of information about himself, his work, his

impressions of people and colonial life in general, intersecting his remarks with delightful nonsense, cutting criticisms, and bold metaphors.

To the man who had been so long in a remote corner of the colony, left entirely to himself with rare intervals of refreshment in a small town like Macassar, it seemed as though he were just returning from an infinitely long journey and had yet to renew his acquaintance with the life, the luxury, and the comfort only a place like Batavia can offer. Anton was not much impressed by the merciless onslaught on officialdom and snobbism that according to van Eelde were rampant—one had only to look about one to realise what a blessing it must be to reside in the centre of the movement, where you could choose your friends from among the crowd of Europeans.

But no sooner was the "Open Sesame" that gave them the feeling of being on an expedition in a strange land spoken, making their renewed intimacy all the more delightful, than van Eelde's overwhelming personality began to reassert its hold upon the younger man. It had always been so, he remembered: one had either to like van Eelde and submit to his masterfulness, or to hate him and leave him alone. His craving for domination, for imposing his opinion—not his will!—on others, seemed to single him out as a leader whom the admirers of his gifts and his unmistakably good qualities might be willing to accept, but who could only offend the many he impressed with dislike or fear. At the bottom of his complicated nature in reality an idealist, his sarcasm, his intolerance, his bitterness made his enemies point to him as spiteful

and arrogant, unfit for the East—as if this were a crime.

To Anton it seemed quite natural to be patronised again, as in the old days, by a man who in a few moments convinced him that, though he had learned a great deal, in essentials he remained the same complicated, undigested character as at the University, where he had given them so many pleasant hours and no end of material for discussion.

Listening, Anton forgot to remember that he was breathing the same air as Marie, that he might see her at any moment seated in one of the victorias that rolled along the broad roadway.

In the cool of the evening social Batavia was coming to life again. Stars began to twinkle in the fast darkening sky, like jewels set in a shield of polished copper.

"You must be glad to be in the midst of humanity once more," van Eelde broke off his jokes and comments.

"Indeed I am."

"But soon you will laugh at us, as we do at the solitary dweller in the *rimbu*. In another month or so you will be watching quite another crowd to this."

"Your time will come, man."

"I have still three years to wait. You know I did not join the service till I had been four years in this blessed land. However, I thank my lucky stars for my present job. There is one good thing in Batavia: now and then you see a woman who has not forgotten how to dress. A few are even good looking."

"What a chap you are to exaggerate! You forget

that five years ago I was here for some time myself. I assure you, in those days——"

"There were beauties galore? I envy you! But you were perhaps especially lucky in attracting them. By the way, you were a great friend of the Delmaars, weren't you?"

It was fortunately nearly dark under the trees. Although he felt as if his heart had suddenly jumped into his throat, van Weghe managed to say in as light and airy a tone as he could muster:

"The Delmaars? The Delmaars? Yes, I knew them slightly. I used to dine there now and then."

Believing as he did that the story of his love must have leaked out long ago, and reached van Eelde's ears as well as those of others, he expected his companion to give a sarcastic chuckle. But nothing of the kind occurred. Van Eelde seemed quite satisfied with his reply, and for the moment they walked on in silence.

What a splendid opening to say frankly: "I was on very friendly terms with them, but I spoilt it all by being foolish enough to fall in love with her." Instead of this, as if he were a stranger who had accidentally heard of the wife's gay tendencies, he went on, when the pause became too oppressive:

"She was rather, how shall I say—a flirt. Do you know her well?"

"Not very. Not more than you did," came van Eelde's reply. "The way that poor little woman is slandered is disgusting," he added warmly. "I have it on reliable authority that it is all gossip and envy. That case of Koster, for instance—the man who was supposed to have killed himself. One of his

superiors, Everding, told me the other day he was simply devoted to his wife, and that when they found the poor chap in the ravine—you will have read about it in the papers—he had her portrait in his hand ; he must have lived for several hours and given his last thoughts to her. Would he have done that—in the face of death, mind—if he had been in love with some one else ? But you know how it is, when a woman is young, lively, fond of admiration. People will talk ! ”

“ Quite true,” Anton admitted mechanically.

“ What the devil does he mean ? ” he said to himself.

“ Is it possible that he wants me to speak of my own experience ? That he is better posted up than he is willing to show ? ”

He must know where he stood. So he said, with a forced smile :

“ At one time they went so far as to connect *my* name with Mrs. Delmaar's. You may perhaps have heard of it ? ”

“ Never ! ” said van Eelde. But he stopped short and turned to Anton :

“ Then you know better than anyone else what beastly liars these people are, and how they besmirch her reputation—just because she happens to be attractive.”

“ Exactly ! ” the latter hastily agreed. A change in the conversation would be very welcome ! He congratulated himself upon not having given himself away.

CHAPTER XV

"**H**ERE we are—we turn in here," van Eelde said, a moment later. They crossed the road, and entered a large garden, between two old-fashioned white pillars on either side of the gate. Anton felt he could breathe again. The evening breeze came wafted over the Plain, and cooled his forehead.

They had to mind where they were going, for it had become quite dark, and under the spreading roof of a waringin tree they felt their way, step by step. Then came a spacious square of grass and, facing them, a massive house, high above the ground, its gloom emphasised by the one solitary gas pit that burnt in the enormous cavity of the front gallery.

On either hand, jutting forward at right angles to the main building, completing the enclosure of three sides of the square, stood a small pavilion. Round that on the left ran a brightly lit veranda.

"There's my tabernacle," said van Eelde, indicating the hospitable light.

Anton involuntarily halted. His attention was attracted by the big house itself, enough of which was discernible to stamp it as the type of the old-world Batavian residence. High white columns

stood out around it, against the deep shadows of the background. He felt a strange, sad sympathy with its departed grandeur; he listened to the voice of years gone by, which spoke from the huge pile so distinctly. He visualised its former conditions, its better days of wealth and splendour, when almost every evening brought with it a new feast, carriages full of guests dashing noisily up to the wide flight of steps, torches heralding each fresh arrival, the soft glow of many candles from within flooding the grass plot and the drive with a tender effervescent glory.

The selfsame waringin still cast the same play of light and shadow on drive and lawn, but now the house lay dreary and neglected, half hidden in the friendly darkness that seemed wishful to screen it from the scorn of new-comers, upstarts, heedless of its former pomp. To Anton it seemed sunk in absent-minded thought, nobly resigned to its fate as he had so often seen the mountains in the interior—far removed from the insistent clamour of present events and needs.

Van Eelde, who had walked on while Anton stayed behind, came back, and stood looking at the old mansion with him. So they remained a moment, silent, side by side, until the host, laying his hand on the other's shoulder, roused him by saying teasingly:

"Do not forget the cottage for the castle!"

"You certainly belong to a new generation with your electric light. It is almost too crude for its surroundings."

They entered the pavilion. The previous tenant, Anton was informed, had done it up from top to toe at his own expense, and had been the first customer

of the new electric light company, on the other side of the Plain. He had also severed it from the main building and provided it with a stable, kitchen, and outhouses of its own, in the small yard behind, out of sight of the approach.

"Ever hear who that last tenant was?" van Eelde asked.

"No, who?"

"Masting, the broker, who cut his own throat about a year ago."

"Did he live here? What a cheerful forerunner!"

"His affairs went askew. He had speculated heavily in Redjang Lebongs, and not being able to fulfil his obligations in cash, tried to pay them *in natura*—or rather to escape paying them at all. Public opinion called him a coward, of course, and there is something in it, I agree, but on the other hand it must require a good amount of cold-blooded pluck to overcome the instinct of self-preservation! Do you mind sleeping in the room where the deed was done?"

"Not I," said van Weghe promptly, though privately he would have much preferred to have been left in ignorance of its unenviable associations.

"One person's nerves are more easily affected than another's. If you object, tell me so at once, and you shall have mine."

"Rubbish! I'm not given to qualms of the kind. I have slept in places out there, in Celebes . . . Besides, all this looks so bright and cosy. Ghosts will be about the last thing to trouble me."

"More congenial companions for the small hours used to haunt it pretty often! But we have stopped all

that. What suited Masting the Magnificent, as we called him at the Club, would not suit *me*."

Anton sent an admiring look around. The steady brightness that streamed forth had already dispelled the pensive mood which the twilight had engendered. He began to feel a desire for close fellowship, for convivial intercourse, a jovial dinner-table and an undisturbed, intimate chat.

He began his inspection of the four rooms which formed van Eelde's *garçonnière*: two in front and two opening on to the side veranda, so that the pavilion was, roughly speaking, in the form of a T square. Everything charmed him in this ideal bachelor's abode.

"Quarters calculated to reconcile one to living in the tropics," he observed.

There were two bedrooms, a dining-room, and the sitting-room they now entered. Anton noticed a couple of fine etchings, a collection of weapons, a splendid large writing-table, an old Dutch cupboard, a Dutch grandfather's clock, and big, well-filled bookcases in carved teak wherever there was room for them.

Flowers stood here and there, in vases and jars; a standard lamp with a yellow shade strewn with strange arabesques shed a tempered light upon the nicknacks, the rare bits of silver and ivory that lay on an antique table. An oblong mirror hung above a wide shelf; before it were low long leathern easy chairs; while one corner of the room was entirely taken up by a large divan, covered with Turkish stuffs, and furnished with three or four huge silk cushions.

The hangings were of some dull, neutral tint. This

was quite another interior to that which had watched his comings and goings in Takalar. Fancy being able to sit and write or read in such a room, as if you were the spoilt son of a rich man in Europe! His enthusiasm rose to such a pitch that van Eelde, while he laughed, almost became impatient.

"It is nice, I quite agree. But, however tasteful and comfortable your surroundings, you soon grow indifferent to their outside appearance. It is the spirit, the pervading atmosphere, that makes them congenial or otherwise. When you have to enjoy them alone they are apt to pall—you forget to value your privileges. And I am much alone here, terribly alone!"

Anton bowed his head in acknowledgment of the fact that his friend's life was after all not exactly enviable—that he must suffer greatly. He almost felt as if he himself were being reproached for the hopeless love the speaker cherished for his sister.

But van Eelde already assumed a lighter tone.

"Don't ask what these bachelor fancies cost me! But they are the only luxury I allow myself, nowadays. I have my son's interests to consider; he is in Holland, yes, and doing well. I intend to save as much money as I can. As a rule I feed at home—have my grub sent in from outside, and it suits me perfectly. You are through in no time, and it is cheaper and a good sight easier than having to cater for yourself. To-night we are dining at the Club—in your honour. You will want to feel yourself in the midst of the world again, and will find some of the old friends, Ploutens, Ollivier, van Haerst, and Wylders. Aren't you lucky to have us five to give you a good send-off?"

"Come and see my bedroom," he went on, "then I will show you yours. We sleep at the extreme ends of the angle. But all the rooms open out of one another, so if you want anything——"

He drew aside a curtain and, turning on the light, flooded the space before them: an oblong room, so unusually large that the enormous bed, carefully enclosed within its mosquito netting, looked insignificant, and the rest of the furniture lost in it.

"Now let me initiate you into another of this pavilion's special advantages!" And opening the farthest of the two Singapore doors, facing to the front, he pointed to a narrow path, which ran along the fence that here served as a boundary and was soon lost in the darkness.

"This was also an invention of Masting the Magnificent. In his capacity as bachelor he used to receive clandestine visits, or, still more discreetly, go himself on some nightly errand to one or other Batavian beauty; and not a soul, his boy included, an atom the wiser. By using this path—with a couple of planks over the ditch farther on and a small gate of which he alone had the key—he could walk straight across to Tanah-Abang, and so away."

"Dear me! Was he such a Don Juan?"

"Of course the stories lost nothing in the repetition—such rumours never do. But he certainly knew how to enjoy life, in his own fashion."

"And is it of any use to you—the path, I mean?"

Van Eelde smiled, with that air of mystery men of broad views are apt to assume in speaking of such

subjects when together. Then, changing his attitude, he said :

" I live like a regular Joseph."

" But have you no frail accommodating Jezebel of your own ? "

" For shame, man ! Are those the expressions you learn in the interior ? If you want to know my views on the point in question : native women don't appeal to me ; lovemaking of that calibre, apart from its degrading quality, is an empty surrogate. As to the others—women you can really care for—' Love and learn ' has made an old fox of me ! I am not easily to be caught, let me tell you."

" Why don't you marry again ? "

" And be happy for ever after ? "

" Is marriage bound to spell failure ? "

" In *my* case it did—the only one I am intimately acquainted with. . . . Shall we have a whisky and soda to drink to your safe arrival ? It is too late for tea, and you must be thirsty. There is Apollonaris on the ice—Kromo ! "

No, Anton would have his bath. So he was conducted to his own quarters : the last two doors opening on to the side veranda, where his luggage was just being carried in.

The moment he was left alone he threw off his travel-stained clothes. What a relief ! He hunted out a set of pyjamas from his trunk ; a vile nuisance to have to unpack for yourself, he grumbled. How he missed Wongso ! But no, he would not be such a slybarite as to complain. He made an effort, and having found *what* he wanted, with his towel slung over his

arm and his soap in his hand, went off, loudly whistling, to the bathroom.

The water was cooler than he had dared to hope. The shower-bath, especially, gave him intense enjoyment. A big, shabby mirror, last remnant of a set of furniture long banished from the living rooms, showed him a tall, well-built figure crowned by a cheerful face. A few energetic exercises and the ablutions that followed charmed away his fatigue, and he returned to his room feeling a new creature. On his way he passed close to the big house, and could see, this time from the side, into a part now lit up, where framed prints hung on the whitewashed walls. He recognised two: "Farewell" and "The Return," pictures he remembered from the days of his childhood in Holland.

Back in his room, he opened the parcel that had come from the tailor's—his new blue serge suit for the voyage. Should he put it on? It would be nice to appear in such typically European garments, and the dinner at the Club was quite informal, van Eelde had said. No—he resisted the temptation and took a white smoking suit instead. What a trial to have to wear a shirt again, after so many years of the military-collared white ducks, with which such a thing was never needed!

Van Eelde sat at his desk in the study, next door, and as soon as he heard Anton moving about again he called out:

"Hurry up! we must have a walk before dinner. Make haste, if you want to get out before every one else goes home."

Van Weghe could not help laughing. His friend seemed all anxiety to bring him into contact with the

world again, as though it would be really dangerous for him—poor exile fresh from the interior!—were his re-entry into society to be postponed for another moment.

While he stood looking at himself, fastening his tie, his thoughts with a pang of self-reproach went suddenly back to Marie, as though he had shamelessly forgotten her.

A knock at his door—and Kromo's voice, in Malay :
"Some one is asking for the *Tuan Controleur*, at the telephone."

At the same moment he heard van Eelde's, from the distance :

"It is *you* they want, Tony!"

Some one for him, at the telephone! How extraordinary! Who the world could it be? Who in all Batavia could have anything to say to him? The Director of Internal Affairs? Nonsense! One of the friends van Eelde had invited for that evening? Some one from Daendels, the shipping agency—he had given them his address—something about his journey or the luggage? Or van Loon, perhaps, who knew he was staying with van Eelde? The possibility that it was Marie could not be entertained for a moment. Not that the idea in itself was so absurd, but because the disappointment if it turned out to be wrong would be too cruel.

Meanwhile he hurried to the instrument at the other end of the front gallery, van Eelde calling after him in boyish glee :

"You big people never get a moment's peace."

"Funny man!" Anton retorted, losing a slipper—

into which only a toe had been thrust—in his excitement.

With a beating heart he took up the receiver. "Who is there?" he asked, in subdued tones.

There came a voice, first faintly from afar, then all at once close by—*she*, it was she! Though more than half prepared, it rendered him speechless for the moment.

"Is that you?" she asked. The three short words were all-sufficient. He would have recognised those accents anywhere.

He leant heavily against the little desk in front of him. His eyes closed. At last he managed to bring out:

"Fancy hearing *you* again! Oh, Marie!"

"Hush! Don't let anyone know. Are you quite alone? Where is Mr. van Eelde?"

"In the other room. He cannot hear me," Anton said, slowly coming to himself.

"Do you still love me? A little? Say 'yes' or no."

"Yes!"

"Would you like to see me before you sail? Can you come to-morrow, early? Say ten o'clock—if you have no other engagement!" she added playfully.

"And if I had?"

"You know where we are living?"

"No."

"Tanah-Abang, just at the back of where you are standing now. You remember the Big House? We took it last year. Till to-morrow then. Good-bye. Henri is out of town, you know."

"You are not going already?"

"My dear boy, I must. I have to dress. I am only just out of the bathroom."

"So am I!"

They both laughed.

"Good-bye, good-bye," he heard again, and when he called he got no answer. Mechanically hooking up the receiver, he sank down on a bench near by.

"You idiot!" he addressed himself. "You blatant fool! There you are!"

The next moment his face brightened. "Netta was right," he muttered. "She could not hear of my return without wanting to see me."

But, if Jeannette had witnessed the glance of satisfaction that accompanied the recollection of her words, she might have doubted the wisdom of her advice that on no account was he to shun the danger.

CHAPTER XVI

THE two long, narrow verandas in front of the Harmonie, Batavia's oldest and principal club, which has as members almost exclusively merchants, planters, and Government officials, were well filled that evening. The file of chairs behind the balustrade, along the top of which runs a narrow board to serve as a table for the drinks, showed but few gaps ; for it was " bitter " time, and the devotees of the inveterate Dutch habit had foregathered here in their usual numbers.

In the centre, forming the main entrance, is a kind of loggia ; and here a large round table from the inner hall had been placed, at the top of the broad steps. Behind it, in a wide semi-circle, sat eight or ten men, in rocking-chairs, drinking, smoking, and chatting. Their rocking was often painfully irregular, until the observant bystander had reason to wish they would keep better time.

All were in white duck, and looked out on to the street, where not much of a lively character was to be seen ; the neighbouring shops had closed, and the thin streamlet of Europeans taking the air at nightfall was almost dried up.

Hotel Wisse, opposite, with its broad glow streaming

forth from ground floor to upper storey, struck an animated note as becomes a hostelry ; but Eigen-Hulp, the big stores, in the background on the left, was plunged in gloom. Its low outline, so dazzling a moment ago, looked shrunken and faded ; like an elderly beauty taking a rest after the feast, who has gladly put off the bravery of her ball attire and slipped into an old but comfortable dressing-gown.

In the foreground the tram-rails, set free from further service until the following day, described a wide curve just before the club ; while across the road was the raised footway with the heavy iron railings on the water side, where the canal, deep and hollow between high brick walls, dozed motionless, inert.

The one-storied rather heavy looking club-building—as if it had for two-thirds sunk into the earth—was only partially lit up. After the glaring heat of the tropical day it is restful to sit in the shadow ; besides, light attracts mosquitoes—a fact worth considering ! A large portion of each wing was left unilluminated, and the interior, marble-floored and white-walled with the exception of the card-room at the corner that was papered in some dark hue, lay to a large extent in semi-darkness.

Along the kerb of the footway bordering the canal stood rows of small dogcarts, tiny, dandyish vehicles, waiting to be hired ; their drivers enjoying a thin native cigarette or *serootoo*, or a little nap, or a chat with a colleague ; their lamps twinkling like red dots beside the white electric radiation, which, however modern and strong, never seems to do more than accentuate the gloom that wraps the East in a shroud of mystery, a whisper of anguish.

Anton van Weghe, having left van Eelde for half an hour, in order to buy a hat, came over the bridge in front of the *Wisse*, and so straight to the Harmonie, where he was to join his host and the other friends invited to meet him. He passed hurriedly down the long row of questioning or indifferent eyes, scanning the owners as they sat lolling indolently in their chairs ; then, not seeing those he sought, walked slowly back again, throwing an impatient glance in return for the stare he now and again encountered.

He saw a face or two he knew ; but no one recognised him, so that he went on without greeting. He grew nervous and uneasy ; his equanimity was only feigned, for in his heart he loathed being exposed to the curiosity of these idlers, so delightfully sure of themselves, whose babble, intermingled with laughter, affected him as intolerable. He hated himself for the silly shyness that his pride refused to accept as the natural outcome of his long absence from a centre where public opinion, represented by Europeans of his own class, in large numbers and of independent views, cared little for an authority *he* had learned to regard as a necessity. Van Eelde's remark, that once in Europe he would miss the prestige the interior had granted him so freely, seemed only too well founded.

"Never mind !" he consoled himself. "We can't have it both ways ! My time for playing the autocrat is over. Let me try to reconcile myself to a democratic world and agree that it is a change for the better !"

But where the deuce were van Eelde and the others ? Why, of course, what a fool he was—they must be on the balcony, round the corner.

Entering the club by the loggia and crossing the empty ballroom on the left, he was attracted by a buzz of voices from the garden side. Pushing open one of the slated doors and stepping outside again, he came upon another table, with five men who sprang to their feet the moment he appeared and loudly welcomed him to the lighted circle. They crowded round him, and while one of them, van Eelde, shouted something about the long time it took to buy a hat, the others drowned his words in an ovation that made some of the people in the front gallery, close by, get up and peep round the corner to see what was happening.

Four hands grasped Anton's, one after the other.

"Here you are at last! Man, man, you *have* done well!" in tones of admiration. "Hullo, Cecil Rhodes, how is the new protectorate?" laughed another. "Well done, Mauk!" (Anton's sobriquet at the University). "Well done, old chap, but where is your ribbon?"

With these and kindred exclamations his old college friends, most of whom he had never yet come across in Java, indulged in the prerogative claimed by real pals, of mixing up raillery with tender concern.

For a moment Anton could not sufficiently steady his voice to speak a word, so overmastering were the feelings the sight of his former chums aroused in him. Indeed, it was a wonderful piece of luck to meet them here! All five he had known intimately, before any of them had thought of coming to the East—in a life gloriously young and delightfully mad, a life that had nothing in common with the experiences of the last ten years, but stood out separately, against the sky of

things, endowed by distance with a meaning and a fragrance of its own. How grand was this discovery : that the old current of sympathy, of mutual interest and affinity, had only slumbered during the interval, had been, as it were, switched off ; a single pressure of the hand and here it was again, in full working order ! It did away with his feeling of self-consciousness, and made up for the lonely years. He felt as if a tremendous bonfire had been kindled in his heart, setting aglow a pile of almost forgotten recollections.

" Such is the force of genuine friendship," he thought, while taking the place of honour amongst his erstwhile brother-students. " It never dies, it is always there. But you must keep its beauty fresh and crisp, preserved from the humdrum of life and the conflict of interests, in a secluded spot of your innermost soul, and label it : ' For rare occasions only ! ' Then, when the moment comes—as it has now—a thrill like this will be your reward ; as with noble wine, time increases its aroma. Drink, lucky beggar, till you return to your daily task refreshed and comforted ! " . . . Truly, it was almost a blessing not to have met for such an age !

Curiously, his previous meeting with van Eelde had not given him this sensation ; the sum total of the various affections was evidently needed to arouse the glorious feeling of being among his own folk again, of having shaken off the last vestige of hardships endured and the terrible forlornness and desolation that is so often the white man's lot in the tropics. No, it was not a dream—here he sat among his University brothers, sons of the venerable mother, *Alma Mater*, under whose

wings they had once lived and learned to understand each other, anxious to tackle that big, mysterious thing: Life.

For a moment, but only for a moment, the cup thus offered him had a bitter taste. All the other five, van Eelde, Ploutens, Ollivier, Wylders, and van Haerst, had taken their degree before leaving college, while he, Anton, through his own fault, had failed. But surely his achievements in Takalar had wiped out whatever disabilities still clung to him as a result of his former follies! Life was generous! Once you admitted you were wrong, the chance was always given you to retrieve your errors.

He looked round the table—six they were, six of the ten who had made up what they called their "club" in Leiden. He liked them—collectively; the moment, however, he began to contemplate them one by one, he realised that his affection varied in shade and in depth, with preferences here and objections there.

He felt especially glad to meet Ploutens, one of the masters at the boys' school at Salemba, who had come to Java three or four years ago, attracted by the relatively large salary offered him. He was a nervous little man, who seemed to have grown still thinner and more emaciated since Anton last saw him, his body seemingly too frail for the big, well-shaped head that proclaimed itself at once as that of a thinker. At the University Ploutens had always kept a little aloof from him and the others, Anton remembered, physically as well as mentally indisposed as he was to take his full share in the exuberance of their spirits and the craving to dive deeply into things that had characterised

their circle, making it a leading element in the young Leiden of their day. But though unable actually to participate in mad adventures or still madder all-night sittings, with their wild attacks on conventionalism and hypocrisy, on compromise and authority—sports Anton had long lost his first untamed passion for!—Ploutens followed their exploits and perorations from afar, in his quiet, philosophical way, with a sympathetic smile; evidently in favour of a freer handling of life's riddles than dogma and accepted tenets were willing to allow, yet reserving his final judgment for the days to come. It would be highly interesting to take this kind-hearted savant apart and make him speak of the truths he must have reaped from the harvest of his later experience.

How different a man was Ollivier, the lawyer, who sat next him; not only in appearance—he was tall, bigly made, and handsome, while Ploutens was short and of delicate, almost poor, physique—but in character, in his views, in his turn of mind. Here, one in whom wisdom and generosity predominated, absorbed in lofty pursuits, instinctively drawn to every manifestation of existence that he might understand; there, a mind exclusively practical, of a man who above all things knew how to handle human material, which he would fain regard as created to serve his ends. Ploutens was an idealist, chastened by reason and experience. What was there in Ollivier, Anton wondered, to counterbalance the egotism that was the keynote of his being? He was interesting to some extent; but all that really mattered to him was success in life, and the satisfaction of his rather vulgar appetites.

Still, though he had long modified his former favourable opinion, Anton did not dislike Ollivier. He would have missed him from the little circle. The fact that he belonged to the "club" softened his judgment; like the others, he stood for dear old times and associations. Notwithstanding his selfishness, Ollivier had something unsophisticated and frank about him, and a charm of his own. He was healthy in body if not equally so in soul; he was direct and daring, a good fighter; he had a dry, ready wit, his paradoxes were continually inspiring, even while one was quite conscious of the fact that they were prompted by no true conviction. It would be interesting to hear him, too, give his experiences, however one-sided they were sure to be! A heart he must have, or he would not be here. Beneath his ironical greeting: "Hullo, Cecil Rhodes!" there lay a genuine cordiality, as if the man who, in his own line, had made the most successful career of them all, recognised in him, Anton, the qualities, latent in the past, that had enabled him to rehabilitate himself in his friends' eyes. Ollivier, by his hearty handshake, had hailed him as a comrade, a man of action. In their "club" days *talk* had been the feature, and Ollivier had taken a leading part in it; but his abilities predestined him for the real life they had been fighting their way through during the last decade, where brilliancy of speech was a mere accessory and only *deeds* counted; they had determined Ollivier's career as well as his own.

Wylders was in the office of the Commissioner for the Land Rent, as a kind of legal adviser, and responsible for the drawing up of reports and proposals which

he—among friends—qualified as “d——d nonsense, but just the kind of thing they like at headquarters!” He was married, and, according to van Eelde, who conveyed the information in a whisper, “under his wife’s thumb.” And indeed, in the course of the evening, when all tongues were loosened and that of Wylders in particular, he confided to Anton how lucky it was for him that the dinner took place just now, while his wife, who did not like “men’s parties,” happened to be in the hills!

Van Haerst, or Jonkheer van Haerst thoe Westra, to give him his full name and title, was the fifth guest at table. He held the position of Officer of Justice, or Public Prosecutor, for West Java. Of old Frisian stock, he was reserved and somewhat morose, but Anton had good reason to remember him as a true friend and was especially glad to meet him again. Through no fault of his own, van Haerst, some time after leaving Leiden, had lost his entire fortune, but in his opulent days he had offered to lend van Weghe—who, having run through his modest patrimony, was at his wits’ end for money—the necessary means to complete his studies. Anton had felt obliged to decline the proposal, but it was one of those things that one never forgets. In this case it was all the more pathetic, as two years later, as a direct result of his misfortune, van Haerst had been obliged to break off his diplomatic career and come to the colony for a living himself.

The tiny glasses of gin and bitters were hardly emptied when dinner was announced, and van Eelde

led his guests to the covered-in, square platform springing out into the garden, which, surrounded by palms and plants in pots and tubs, formed what practically amounted to a small private room, quite apart from the general dining-room. Here they found an elegantly arranged table laid for six persons. Under the full blaze of light it looked pretty and inviting, and the menus, a *chef d'œuvre* of delightful nonsense concocted by the host, proved a great success. Two big electric fans helped to keep the atmosphere tolerably fresh. Once more Anton said to himself: "What a blessing to be back in civilised surroundings!"

As the "boys," in their red and white uniforms, filled the glasses, conversation became general, and soon turned on Anton's approaching departure. All were instantly brought under the same spell—as though the name had been mentioned of one loved and honoured; as though a favourite melody sounded softly from afar.

Can there be anything more touching in a distant foreign land than to see exiles, men and women, brought under the influence of the magic word "home"?—how in a flash the visionary eye overrides the actual one, forcing the mind back to the bounds of memory, to far other days than these! Even Olivier, the practical, became preoccupied for a while, stopping in the midst of his remark that colonies were no good unless you made them pay.

"When my time for Holland comes," said Ploutens, "it shall be for good. No going back with the prospect of having to return. That's why I am holding out as long as I can—and to give the folks in *patria* a chance

of first making me a professor!" he added with a forced smile.

"If I come across one of the wire-pullers at home, I'll jog his elbow for you," Anton assured him.

Amused at the idea, Ploutens playfully nodded his thanks.

"Another two years and it will be *my* turn," cried Wylders. "I shall not tell you people my plans, but they are grand! Good Lord!"

"My scheme is the best," ejaculated Ollivier. "If you——"

"Nobody doubts it," interrupted van Eelde, "because nobody cares. Ever noticed that, Tony?"

"Why can't you call him *Mauk*, as we others do?" protested Wylders.

"I have always called him Tony and always shall, if it is all the same to you," came van Eelde's calm retort.

It was an involuntary recognition of the special footing he and Anton had been on, in the days of his engagement to Jeannette. Anton felt touched by the recollection. He lifted his glass and, nodding, drank to the man who, he always felt, should have been his brother-in-law.

The object of his silent pity, however, did not look as if he needed it. He beamed with delight. Seen as a host, van Eelde was seen at his best. The more animated the party grew, the more he became its leading spirit; the more firmly the success of the evening seemed assured, the readier the flood of drollery flowed from his lips, as if only waiting for a sympathetic audience. Meanwhile, he kept an eye on his guests

to see if there was anything wanted, and on the native "boys" to ensure the service being properly performed.

Anton, watching him, thought how like he was to the flag-bearer in van der Helst's famous picture, "The Banquet of the Civic Guard," a big, fair man, in the prime of life, robust and well-made, though a little too fat, with a round, bearded face; debonair and delightful, intelligent, and at the same time endowed with a strong love of the good things of life—a typical Dutchman. But in van Eelde there was a versatility, an initiative, and a repartee as rare in the average Dutchman as in—others. He was original. In so far he defied comparison.

Twice or thrice he had a skirmish with Ollivier that hovered on the verge of unpleasantness, and in which the artist got the better of the professional fighter—but, taken as a whole, van Eelde's conviviality was as jovial and irresistible as it was infectious.

The merriment grew, the voices became louder and louder.

They talked of women, of course. What group of men, left to themselves, can avoid at least touching on the subject? Here "shop" was not only tabooed—it was impossible; the six members of the party had, by a stroke of luck, each a different sphere of interests.

But interest in the sexual question they all had in common—it was keen and general. Ollivier started the discussion by reminding Anton that, once in Europe, among other good things the East offered, he would miss "our litue friends Sarina, Aisha, Aminah, and so on."

Anton shrugged his shoulders and smiled disdainfully. "Fancy being in Europe and missing *them*!" he exclaimed.

"Don't be ungrateful, man!"

"Don't you be cynical!"

"European and native women are not to be compared," declared van Haerst.

"Who said I compared them?" Ollivier asked, turning from Anton to the last speaker. "Give me native women to amuse myself with here, and European there, and I am perfectly satisfied."

"If native women did not make themselves so cheap, if they had any sense of pride and personal dignity——" here van Eelde joined in the discussion without completing the sentence.

"I should say their cheapness is their great advantage," Ollivier retorted.

"Another of your paradoxes. You don't mean cheap in the monetary sense, I suppose?"

"Oh no—in the same sense you do," the barrister replied. "I maintain that in pleasing contrast to the humbug and affectation in Europe, the idiotic presumption of the chorus girl and the bad feelings stirred up by the man-eaters of the day, these harmless little things give us more in return for what we give them than their European sisters."

"Don't call them 'sisters,' whatever you do!" van Haerst protested.

"Your theory is as immoral as it is absurd," said van Eelde, in response to Ollivier's challenge. "By preserving her self-respect—and I should like to know how much of that the average native woman has!—

a woman enhances her value, makes herself more desirable. In other words, she increases the favours she bestows."

"Does she really? Or does, in nine cases out of ten, the man's patience reach the breaking point? If she rates her attractions, her 'favours' as you call them, too highly—well, the man who is not a fool will simply leave her to herself."

"Then there must be a good many fools in the world—that's all I can say."

"Possibly! It's a fact I don't deny."

"It is all a question of taste," from Wylders.

"No—a question of principle," from Ploutens.

"All I meant," Ollivier resumed his argument, "is that to most men the easy virtue of the East comes as a pleasant change after the lengthy preliminaries and exacting terms the courtship of a western belle imposes. The male instinct is to possess. He does not like to be kept at bay *ad infinitum*."

"Of course not—but the clever woman knows by intuition where to draw the line. Just because she is able to do that she will let her lover wait a bit. In the end he can only be thankful for a coquetry that gives additional charm to the surrender," van Eelde said.

"Some folks like to hide the real state of affairs behind beautiful fantasies and self-imposed restrictions; others, more practical and candid——" Ollivier went on.

"Prefer to live like beasts, without any restraint at all?" Anton asked warmly. "I can't for a moment believe you would defend a man who deliberately

chooses a native woman before one of his own race. It is only for the sake of argument that you——"

"I thought you had permitted yourself some small experience of native women!" Ollivier retorted.

"So I have. As a *pis aller*. That is how I know——"

"That you ought to give them up? Of course, if you are thinking of marrying——"

There was a little pause. The conversation had taken a more serious turn. Before Anton's mind rose Annie's image—it looked reproach and indignation. He dismissed as best he could the painful reminder, drowning it in the glass of Heidsieck just refilled. He would have to face that silent verdict and find some way of reconciling the present with the past—but not here, not now.

They talked home politics. Then they crossed the seas again and discussed the question of what would become of the colony should the present *régime* carry out its plan of starting a Calvinistic crusade among the thirty million Mohammedans. Anton said there would be trouble; while van Eelde prophesied the speedy end of the Dutch supremacy if these fanatics had their way. Van Haerst, who held strong views on religion, disagreed. He was of opinion that India owed a great deal to the missionaries, and that to support them officially would be good policy. Ollivier—always ready to take sides against van Eelde, whose predominance in the "club" he considered not justified by fact and his own capacities insufficiently recognised by the other—declared himself in favour of the proposed propaganda. His arguments, however, proved unacceptable to the man to whose rescue he had come. When he said: "Give them both a fair chance—here

thirty million Moslemin, there a handful of Christians with officialdom behind them to make up for their inferiority in numbers. Let them have a good set-to; it will clear the air and be very amusing," van Haerst indignantly protested. To represent the thing as a duel was in his eyes disgraceful. He had a better suggestion: that the heathen world should be approached with the honest desire to open its heart to an understanding of life's problems in a peaceful, persuasive way. Why should this not be done under the auspices of the same authority that had brought a better administration to these millions, a more impartial justice than they had ever enjoyed or been able to establish for themselves? Why should not spiritual guidance and practical politics go hand in hand? Why not believe in their harmonious co-operation?

"Because history is on the side of the disbelievers!" Ploutens interposed. "It has often been tried, but any religious bias in the ruling of a land has always led to disaster."

"A priest-ridden country goes inevitably to the dogs," van Eelde joined in. "History swarms with instances. The Mohammedans themselves . . . Take Turkey——"

"I prefer to take a little more of that *pâté de foie gras*. It is excellent, and a thing I don't get every day at home!" Wylders put in.

The little joke came just in time. Van Eelde decided on an immediate diversion. He rose, and looking round with an apologetic glance, made a little speech in Anton's honour, ending with:

"Drink his health with me! Fill your glasses to the brim, and empty them *ad fundum*. Give him a

three times three that will make the fusty people in the card-room believe there is another earthquake—worse than the one last night ! Tony, old chap, here's to you ! Hip, hip, hip, hurrah ! Hurrah ! Hurrah ! ”

Taking into account that there were only four people to chime in, the response to this appeal was very satisfactory. The old Harmonie did not shake on its foundations, neither did the marble floors nor plastered ceilings crack, but from the card-room there actually came an emissary to protest ; and, if the dining-room had not been by this time empty, other diners would in all probability have protested too.

Less aggressive, and, from a melodious point of view, more acceptable, was the “ *Iō Vivat !* ” the students' song, that as a matter of course followed the hurrahs. This time etiquette did not prevent Anton joining in. With flushed cheeks and palpitating hearts they stood round, singing lustily, looking at each other with radiant eyes :

“ *Iō vivat, Iō vivat !
Nostrorum sanitas !
Hoc est amoris poculum
Doloris est antidotum—
Iō vivat, Iō vivat !
Nostrorum sanitas !* ”

(Hail Minerva ! Hail Minerva !
To the health of all of us
This cup of affection
That cures all pains, etc.)

and again :

“ *Nos jungit amicitia
Et vinum praebebat gaudia—
Iō vivat, Iō vivat !
Nostrorum sanitas !* ”

(Friendship binds us
And wine makes us merry, etc.)

Hardly had the last tones of the time-honoured chorus died away, than Anton began to intone another, not less calculated to call up old-time memories. Beginning with the force of a triumphal march, it ended rather feebly. To the singers, however, it was dear beyond expression ; it evoked endless recollections of college days and nights, and stirred up an enthusiasm in the souls of the six as had not been there for years.

" Gaudeamus igitur
Juvenes dum sumus,
Post jucundam juventutem
Post molestam senectutem
Nos habebit humus ! " (bis)

(Let us then be merry
While we are still young,
For after joyful youth
And troublesome old age
The earth will claim us !)

After this apotheosis it was impossible to sit quietly down again. Dinner was practically over, so van Eelde suggested an adjournment to the front for their coffee and liqueurs ; but it took some little time before he got them all there, the empty ballroom through which they had to pass proving an irresistible attraction. After a fantastic *pas de deux* by Ollivier and Wylders, Anton made a great hit with a veil dance " as performed in the Macassar upper circles." This was followed by a still more audacious specimen of terpsichorean art, a *quadrille d'honneur*, in which the host himself was forced to take part, and that all agreed must beat the one danced lately at Concordia*.

* The military club in Batavia.

hollow, in originality as well as in the inexhaustible brio of the dancers.

When about two hours later Anton and van Eelde turned their steps homewards, Anton declared that never, in all his Indian days, had he enjoyed himself so thoroughly or been made so entirely to forget that he was in the East.

This was perfectly true, for in his emotion he had almost lost sight of Marie's message and of the coming meeting.

Suddenly, as van Eelde and he were entering the house, he thought: "Good God! How will things be this time to-morrow? I wish it were all over!"

CHAPTER XVII

THAT night Anton awoke, to see the same strong line of light underneath the door leading into van Eelde's study that he had noticed before he closed his eyes. Was it left on all night, he wondered? Could it not be lowered?

How long had he slept? Surely three or four hours. How annoying to recover consciousness when only partly rested! He had been very tired and had gone straight to bed, refusing the whisky and soda van Eelde tried to press upon him. As he stretched out his wearied limbs he had felt he was in for a ten-hours' slumber—and here he lay, interrupted in what was evidently only the beginning of his well-earned repose. Rest? He wished he could find it! It was always so with him: over-excitement made sleep impossible.

His mind was filled with visions of Marie. Was she also thinking of him, or would she have dropped off to sleep hours ago?

The few minutes at the telephone seemed curiously distant; perhaps because they transported him far back into the past. With a keen remorse he realised his intense desire to see her. It was absurd and humiliating. How could he—even for a moment—lose sight of the fact that she had played him false,

and that, ever since, she had stood before him in all the nakedness of her cold, selfish nature? Having once seen through her, how could he be such an idiot as to be lulled into the belief that she loved him now? She did not know what love was; she cared for no one but herself; to run risks, make sacrifices for another were the last things she ever thought of. Like all egoistical women, in her heart of hearts she had a great contempt for men; she thought them a poor lot, perhaps just because she turned their heads so easily. She seemed instinctively to feel that a man who fell in love with her must be silly and weak. From her they had nothing to hope, nothing to expect—this she knew unconsciously; she was unable to give anything, especially herself, in the inner, deeper sense—that was what it came to.

Why so hard on her? he stopped to ask. Why this revulsion from the ecstacy of the afternoon? Because that mood had been artificial? A trick of the senses played on his better judgment? Or had his present critical attitude some connection with the fact that she had made the first move, that he knew she wished to see him? Had the victory been too easy, the realisation of his silent wish too prompt? Would he, had she not sent for him, be in the throes of passion?

He was too tired to analyse clearly. He did not wish to think. But the wild craving for oblivion made oblivion impossible; he must keep calm, so as to forget every one and everything. Insensibility . . . unconsciousness . . . With a start he was wide awake again. He had heard a mosquito buzz! And—inside the net! With every sense on the alert he compelled

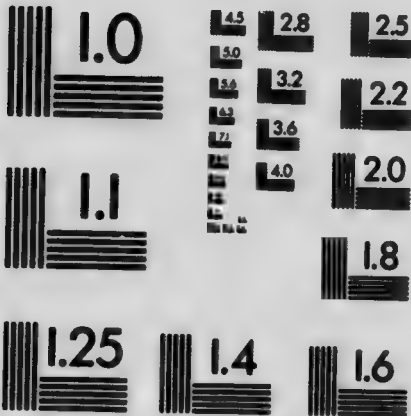
himself to lie absolutely still. The sound was about his head—yes, the little devil settled on his ear. He would give it time to make itself at home, to forget all danger while biting him. . . . He waited ten seconds—a good smack that made his ear tingle and—there was the buzzing again! It must be another of the brutes—now it was right underneath his nose, touching his moustache, nearly making him sneeze. He waited once more—it was only a question of patience and lightning-quick action at the right moment. He struck a second time . . . miss again! The little horrors! the dreadful creatures! Of what possible use were they? He would willingly pay a good round sum to have them all annihilated. The pests! Now they buzzed round him continuously; they would not even settle. He had made them suspicious, had upset them. He sneered with grim humour. He felt a violent irritation in the palm of one hand—*stung*, of course! A similar experience in other parts of his body was almost simultaneously 'phoned to headquarters. It was unbearable. With a terrible execration he sat up in bed. "The blessed thing is full of them!" he groaned. "No one has taken the trouble to whisk it out properly!" He felt terribly ill-used and cursed Kromo, van Eelde's boy, and again called himself a fool for having dismissed Wongso.

In a fit of impotent rage he lay down, but for a moment succeeded in mastering his frenzy. It was a trifle, after all, he tried to make himself believe. "Come, a little philosophy! You have only to refuse to pay the slightest attention and——" Another buzz, right by his other ear—how could he possibly



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pretend not to hear it? And how he had to scratch!

He sat up. Poof! . . . it was suffocating. He could not endure it. He must get out of this at once; he wanted a drink—an endless draught of ice-cold water! Was there still iced water to be had? Supposing he could not find it—could he in decency call up van Eelde? He decided that he could—no host had a right to sleep in peace while the guest was enduring tortures.

He must act. First he kicked the mosquito-net two or three times to frighten off any of the pests that might have settled on the outside. Then, resolutely and swiftly, as if his life depended on the haste he made and with the deftness born of long practice, he flung both legs forward underneath the net and, moving his arms as if about to swim, reached the floor in a single bound, immediately closing the net behind him, to prevent more mosquitoes entering than those already there. Delivered from the oppression of that imprisonment, with a heavy sigh he sank down on the nearest chair. But the buzzing round him was redoubled—with a yawn he got up to carry out the second part of his plan.

He crossed the room and opened the communicating door, to be nearly blinded by the glare that met him. He had to close his eyes.

"Hullo, old chap, what's wrong? Had enough already?" was the greeting. There, a few paces from him, was van Eelde, serene and watchful, at his writing-table.

"Do you never go to bed?" Anton asked him in

a melancholy tone, which gained slightly in animation as he added: "Have you ice?"

"Yes, in the jug, if it's not all melted, given the fact that it's a good hour since I put it in."

"An hour! What's the time?"

"Half-past one."

"Get along!"

Van Eelde pointed to the grandfather clock in the corner. Anton gave a groan.

"Where's the jug?" he said, in a voice that made van Eelde laugh aloud.

"Poor man! Are you so thirsty? Have your whisky and soda now?"

"Not I! All I want is water—plenty, and as cold as can be!"

"It is on the sideboard, over there. Will you fetch it for yourself? Turn the light on. I am so wrapped up in this *sarong** I can't very well stir. If I do, the mosquitoes will have me!"

"You keep a beastly lot of them! And don't you find it frightfully hot?"

"I am just beginning to cool off. It is getting nice and fresh."

"Oh, is it?"

Anton looked at him with something like contempt, then went through to the dining-room, where no extra light was needed, as the folding doors from the study were wide open. He found the jug and, taking the largest tumbler he could see, poured himself out a glass of water. It was still cold—thank Heaven!

* A piece of printed or "batik'ed" cotton, worn by the natives like a skirt.

As he was sending it trickling down his throat he suddenly stopped in amazement. In the mirror of the sideboard in front of which he stood, van Eelde, in the adjoining room, his back still turned to him, was reflected, as the central figure in a picture. Just as the vague idea crossed Anton's mind that it was an exact presentment of a tiny stage, the man in the mirror picked up a photo from in front of him, and after what seemed a long glance—or was it a kiss?—pushed it between the leaves of a blotting-book on his left. It was the affair of a few seconds; but the intention to hide the photo was clear.

Whose could it be? thought the amazed observer. His wife's? The idea was absurd. Van Eelde had not so much as mentioned her name, and had used bitter enough terms when alluding to his experience as a benedict. Would he hide *her* photograph from view, even supposing he had had it out before him? "No"—the answer came as a whip across his face—"it was . . . Jeannette's, of course!"

Anton slowly put down his glass. In the excitement of his discovery his thirst had pretty well left him.

Good God, what a tragedy! This lonely man, after all that had come and gone, still treasuring his sister's image. How sad and cruel! Two people who, in spite of what Jeannette might say, would have made the finest couple he could think of.

He felt an almost irresistible desire to speak, to provoke an outburst of confidence from the other. Would it not relieve van Eelde to unburden his heart, to give, just for once, voice to his longing? Though, alas, what good would it do—what could he say to him?

That Jeannette cared for him no longer, that she was, or had convinced herself that she was, perfectly happy with de Wilt; that it was absurd to expect her to respond to his appeal? What comfort could the truth afford the sorrowing lover? Then, evidently, he did not wish to take the brother into his confidence; and the privacy of his yearning, which in its hopelessness sent a thrill of emotion through Anton's heart, must be respected. After all, the watcher mused, is not a great love, even when unanswered, in itself a thing worth cherishing? Does it not, by the very pain it causes, purify and ennoble, initiating us into deep mysteries of our inward life that would otherwise remain unexplored and incomprehensible?

Anton was now fully himself, with every sense alert and tingling. To go straight back to his room was out of the question. He returned to the study, and walked up and down, undecided what to do.

"Do you never go to bed, you idiot?" he said again, addressing van Eelde, determined to hide his softer feelings. "And what the deuce is all that wri'ing? Secret despatches? Reports to make the Central Office sit up? Out with it!"

"Idiot, yes; that's what I should be, if for the paltry eight hundred guilders a month I get I were to sacrifice my night's rest to their vagaries! No, you poor wandering soul, I am working for myself."

"You don't mean——" Anton began. He came up to the bureau, his eyes fixed on a pile of sheets closely covered with the familiar characters.

Van Eelde coloured slightly, instinctively spreading

out both hands over his papers. He looked up and smiled but did not speak.

"I know ; you are writing a book. You are nicely caught, man ! I always suspected you of something of the kind. How mean ! While I lie tossing, miserable, not sleeping, here you sit, secretly building up your immortality !"

"Don't grudge me my poor laurels, Hero of Bisapo ! And *secretly* ? I was just arranging the pages and putting some finishing touches, to show i' to you before you sail."

"What is it all about ?" Anton eagerly asked.

"You are not in any hurry to get to bed again ?"

"Hang bed ! But there are mosquitoes here too ! The beastly things !" And he scratched in despair.

"Do as I do : give yourself a good rub with *kayu putih* (eucalyptus oil) ; there is the bottle on the shelf. Then wrap your legs up in a *sarong*—you will find one on the divan in my bedroom."

"You certainly stink enough to frighten anything away ! However, as it is the only chance . . . Your boy left some buzzers inside my *klambu* (mosquito-netting)—and you know what that means !"

"Did he ? I am sorry. He will hear from me tomorrow. Now be quick !"

"Come, this promises to be interesting !" Anton cried, hurrying away to follow his host's advice. When he had plentifully besmeared himself with the strong-smelling oil he came back and, carefully rolling himself round in the *sarong* he brought with him, sank down in an easy chair.

"Read away—I am all attention," he announced.

" First answer me one thing : Have you ever been in love with a married woman ? "

Anton sat nonplussed for a moment. What an opening ! What was he to say ? How could he reply either yes or no ? He tried to temporise.

" That's rather a personal question ! Suppose I had, could you for a moment expect me to tell ? " he said tentatively.

" Heavens, man, I don't want particulars. All I am asking is, have you, speaking generally, had the experience ? "

" What difference would it make if I had ? "

" Lots ! It would be so much easier for me to explain and for you to understand. But I know all I require. Your attitude betrays you. Well, in this book, the hero loves a woman who is married already, and he takes the final plunge, not guided by blind passion, later to repent what he has done, but intentionally, without a spark of remorse when he has succeeded in his purpose. What do you think of that ? "

" I am afraid I don't quite follow."

" Either you are dense, or I am explaining badly. It amounts to this : in flat contradiction to all accepted tenets, I make him carry out a deliberate plan to possess the woman he desires—yet I claim for him, from my readers——"

" Their admiration ? "

" Well, no, but their sympathy, their recognition that at the bottom he is right. I demand that he shall be regarded as an honest, decent chap, notwithstanding——"

" I am afraid you will demand in vain ! "

" People will not swallow it, you mean ? "

" They will look upon your hero as a cad ! He acts deliberately, you said—with due premeditation ? How in the world can you defend it ? It is bad enough when passion drives one, when the consequences have *not* been weighed——"

" You must agree that before the two are *de facto* one, the woman cannot look upon the link that binds her to the husband as completely severed. Only then can she fully realise what the new love in her life means, and that it is impossible for her to belong to the man who married her any longer."

" That's another question, and it you must judge from the standpoint of the lover. While the woman has still to be gained——"

" Stop ! You admit that to win he will do his utmost. You consider that as quite allowed, even though she is married, don't you ? "

" It ~ll depends."

" Depends ? On what ? He will have no rest before he has made her confess her love, and how will she do that ? In words alone, or will she give herself if he claims her ? By owning her love she has said *A*—how can she refuse to say *B*, when it follows as a logical consequence ? "

" Do you recognise the existence of a thing called self-restraint ? "

" Yes, but it would have a poor effect applied *after* her confession ! Her disloyalty to her husband is already a fact the moment she accepts the other as her lover."

" I thought you said she could only consider the link

with her husband as completely severed when she had given herself entirely."

Van Eelde looked annoyed, and made a gesture of impatience. "My standpoint is, that having fallen in love with the man and having told him so, any restraint on her part is a matter of policy, not of principle. It cannot alter the fact that the breach with the husband is morally accomplished. She now belongs to her lover, and the sooner an end is put to the unnatural position *vis-à-vis* the husband, the better. How can this more effectually be done than by saying to the lover: 'I am yours—take me!'? I wonder you don't see this for yourself!"

"I thought I was being consulted as an expert in love affairs. But now that I happen to disagree——" Anton suddenly stopped short. With a most painful shock he realised that van Eelde was pleading his own cause—that the woman he would like to place before the *fait accompli* was—Jeannette!

The blood mounted to his cheeks at the idea. But he succeeded in mastering his anger in so far as to recall in time that his sister's name must on no account be mentioned—any direct allusion to her would be too terrible for words. If his suspicion proved correct he must content himself with the meagre satisfaction of having seen through the other's little game, and thus being placed on his guard. It was a beastly situation. He wished van Eelde had kept his confidences to himself.

"So in this book," he said, "you are trying to gain proselytes for the theory that every man who

endeavours to bring a woman to the ultimate step is quite justified in doing so ? ”

“ When he is in love with her and she with him—yes. He would not be a man if he did not.”

“ And is this your personal opinion ? ”

“ Of course. What value would it have if it were not ? ”

“ I mean, does the situation in your story rest on experience ? Or is it perhaps your intention to put these theories into practice ? ”

“ Suppose, following your example, I were to say : That’s too personal a question. But I shan’t ! Without mentioning names or details, I don’t see why I should not tell you I *am* in love with a married woman, and I am determined to make her give me the full proof of her affection, as the one effective way to break with her husband. I am ready to do that, certainly ! ”

Van Eelde spoke with emphasis, his arms folded over his breast. Anton again restrained himself with difficulty.

“ And you think,” he asked, after a pause, “ that the woman in question will consent to be sacrificed ? ”

“ Sacrificed ? Are you mad ? I am only pushing her to the point where she wants to be. My initiative is necessary—I owe this resolute bearing to her as well as to myself.”

“ Some day, some day, some day she will send for me ! ” Anton hummed. After all, it was wiser to regard the whole thing as a joke. It would be absurd to take it seriously. He could safely leave it to Jeannette to protect herself against this mad admirer.

Van Eelde, evidently hurt by the other's lack of appreciation, gathered up the pile of papers in front of him and threw it into a drawer.

"It is no use reading you any of this," he said. "We had better both of us be off, or we shall be like boiled owls in the morning."

"But I should like to read it to myself. Do let me have it. Even if I don't agree with all you say, what does it matter?"

"I am no longer sure of the beastly thing. That's the worst of telling others: you are made to doubt yourself. I ought to have handed it to you without a word. You would have enjoyed it, I am certain—but now——"

Anton said nothing more. Presently van Eelde rose and, unwinding himself from the *sarong*, remarked in indifferent tones:

"I have kept you up an unconscionable time. Sorry, old chap. Good-night!" And in his impulsive, resolute way, off he went to his room.

"He is furious with me and so ought I to be with him," Anton pondered. "But let me try to be fair! Suppose he . . . been Marie's brother. . . . Would that, in the old days, have had any influence with me?"

He had to own that it would not. After he got back to bed he thought for some time, deeply, until at last he fell asleep, and did not wake until the sun was shining.

CHAPTER XVIII

VAN WEGHE stopped the *dos-à-dos* in the road in front of the Delmaars' house, paid the man and, alighting, passed through one of the two wide gate-ways—with their short octagonal pillars and connected by a low balustrade in stucco—into the drive that swept round a bed of cannas, past the wide stone steps, and so out to the road again. On his right stood a long, straight line of Brazilian palms, their smooth, pale grey stems quaintly bulging in the middle, like monstrous serpents standing on their tails, their lofty heads drooping in an air already hot.

Involuntarily he glanced at the footpath on the further side of the *bilik* fence, running straight to the back, where it joined what van Eelde had christened "Masting's Walk." Though, since last night, he was aware that the narrow path led directly from van Eelde's to Marie, and that to cover the distance between would be but the work of a few minutes, he had preferred to drive, taking the longer way round. He wished to pay his call, as it were, officially, not as a dropper-in. Besides, in the growing heat of the tropical morning there was his personal appearance to consider—he could not present himself hot and perspiring. While he had quite made up his mind that

their meeting should be simply calm and friendly, that all idea of beginning the old story over again was totally excluded, he was by no means indifferent to the impression he would make in the coming interview. He had paid unusual attention to his toilet, had donned the coat of the new serge suit over a spick and span shirt, with his very smartest tie, and a pair of immaculate white duck trousers. Seeing him in this turn-out, he felt sure Marie's first thought would *not* be: "Just back from the wilds of Celebes!"

The large white mansion he was approaching was by no means strange to him. In the days of his former sojourn in Batavia: had been occupied by the head of the Finance Department, whom he knew slightly, and once or twice he had dined in the stately hall, overlooking what was euphemistically styled "the back-garden." Another time a ball was given. Marie and he had both been present and her remark on that occasion: "This is where *I* should like to live!" came back to him, making him think how she always succeeded in getting what she wanted. Even if he had never before set foot there, as an ex-Batavian he would have known the house well by sight. Its size, its position, above all, the fact that it had an upper storey—quite a feature in Batavia—singled it out amongst its colleagues as "the big house in Tanah-Abang."

It was not without architectural ambitions. There was the happy idea of the lofty *bel-étage*, high above the ground, dominating the pile of stone, dark and solid like a stronghold, upon which it rested; the elaborately worked ornamentation of the main divisions that broke

the monotony of the whole planes and the crudity of the corners; the round apertures, at regular distances and gorgeously framed, through which the ground floor—that had its separate entrances—got its limited amount of light; above all, the two winding flights of steps, gracefully curved but unusually high and steep, leading straight from the garden to the *bel-étage* with its immense front gallery. Indeed, a welcome deviation from the Doric temple style, followed in the houses of the prevailing type, was here attempted and not unsuccessfully carried out; though the expression of Italian architecture in common cheap materials—except for the marble of the flooring—had something ludicrous, if not pathetic, about it.

The sun hung in the sultry, quivering air and blazed fiercely down upon him, as, stumbling through the thick loose layer of gravel, Anton passed row upon row of whitened flower pots on their pedestals, like breakers surging round a rock, arranged in three groups of equal size, one between the two curving flights of steps, and one on either side. "Her roses!" he murmured, wondering if she still cared for them as in the days of old, when her *la Frances* and *Maréchal Niels* could boast of a local reputation.

Reaching the nearest flight he summoned up all his self-command. At last the great moment had arrived!

Suddenly he halted. From behind the enormous linen "sails" which, just above him, protected the interior from the scorching heat outside, came the sound of a piano. One of his favourites, Spielmann's "Lied," was being played. Until now he had succeeded in keeping fairly calm, but for *this* he was not prepared.

"The old trick, my boy! Be wise!" an inward voice spoke in warning, but was powerless against the overwhelming sensation that no sweeter, more delicate welcome could have been prepared for him. He quickly mounted the marble stairs, pushed aside the linen barricade, and, stepping through the narrow opening, over the base of a mighty column, slipped out of the stifling glare into the spacious gallery within. As he expected, it was empty. The music came from a room on the left, evidently her boudoir. On tiptoe, with a beating heart, he strode forward. Keeping a careful eye on the venetian doors through which the strains flowed, he let himself down on a wicker stool to listen.

Mechanically he submitted to the charm sent out to capture him. In waves of liquid crystal, now aglow with passion, now tinged with delicious sadness, through sobs and smiles, through light and darkness, the periods went and came, carrying him back to sensations never exhausted, to aromas rarely scented, making all seem strange and new, yet like things experienced before.

This, he dreamed, was the real Marie, the expression of her soul; which, detached from the woman of the world, the terrible flirt, the sybarite that in daily life she was, revealed her as craving for sympathy just like himself; as one who at the bottom of her heart understood him, knew how to rouse and satisfy his secret needs. Between her and him disillusion and suspicion should never have arisen. Past and Present flowed into one—their long, mute separation seemed no more than a terrible nightmare.

But the music ceased. He stood up, endeavouring

as he rose to prevent the *rotan* seat from creaking, in his anxiety to preserve the solemn stillness that now reigned. There was no need to be announced. Softly he approached the door behind which he was sure to find her.

"Shall I not rather go away?" flashed through his brain. "Of what use is it to see her?" He paused. It did seem wiser to return. Unseen by him, she had soothed his heart and left an indelible impression—what more did he require? Why not be satisfied with the echo of what was noble and glorious in their former mad adventure, instead of calling up the spirits of evil that had driven them fatally to the abyss? There was still time to retrace his steps—it could easily be done. He would go straight to the club and ring her up from there.

"I came to you, Marie, as arranged," he might say. "I stood outside your room while you played to me. It was sweet, and has given me great comfort. A thousand thanks, and now—good-bye!"

He had already started gently back across the wide stretch of marble flags, when a noise behind him made him swing round. The door he had been watching slowly opened, and there she stood, on the threshold.

"Tony!" she exclaimed. Then directly: "You are late. I began to wonder——"

"I have been here some time," he said.

"And you did not come in to me?"

"I was listening to your music. I did not want to stop you. It would have broken the spell."

There was a pause. Why did she not rush up and

throw herself into his arms? They were open to receive her, but she did not stir.

"You! After all these years! It seems ages, ages," she said at last with a nervous little laugh that made the remark sound almost formal. He nodded gravely. They looked at each other, she smiling, he greedy for the welcome in her eyes, which her words had failed to give him. "Well——" she began again, growing restless under his gaze.

He advanced, eager to embrace her. But she grasped both his hands and pressed them in her own.

Her manner hurt him deeply. The splendid moment was irremediably spoilt. Was it coquetry made her forget he was not a casual admirer, but one with an irrefutable claim to kiss her whenever he liked?

Her arms hung by her sides. Placing a hand on each, he bent down, his face on hers. But, drawing back her head, she shook it emphatically.

"No, no!" she whispered. "You must not kiss me!"

"Why not?" he protested angrily, though he released her. Then he realised that she was right. The front gallery, closed to the outside world, was open to all parts of the house—what if a servant should enter unexpectedly?

"Come into my room," she said, as if to give him the opportunity he desired. He followed her, shutting the slatted doors behind him.

Here the daylight was still more rigorously excluded, the shutters before the large window allowing only a single ray to break through and pencil a fantastic

streak on the floor. As he became accustomed to the relative darkness, he discovered that his first impression—that she was carrying out a plan from which she did not intend to be diverted—was the right one. When he tried to grasp her, she evaded him. There was a bewildering moment in which she apparently disappeared, till a movement from behind a screen betrayed her. So she was deliberately putting a barrier between herself and him. She chose to keep him, *him*, at a distance! He would not think of playing hide-and-seek with her. His first impulse was to take his hat and go. But realising that this would give her the satisfaction of seeing how cruelly she had wounded him, he decided not to leave immediately. Throwing himself into a chair he gave a contemptuous laugh.

"I shall not touch you," he exclaimed. "If you take me for a love-sick boy you are mistaken. I don't want to kiss you any longer. It is not worth the fuss you are making."

"It is in both our interests that we should avoid letting ourselves get out of hand. We must have a serious talk," she said, seating herself in a tiny chair, right in front of him. Then, soothingly: "There are lots of things I want to know. First, tell me all about yourself."

"As if you cared!" he said rudely. Her attitude irritated him beyond endurance. It was as if, now that he had so promptly responded to her call, thus showing his eagerness to meet her, all she demanded was to enjoy her triumph. He had been an idiot to come.

"I read a lot about you in the papers—by the way,

your portrait in the *Weekblad* was not half nice enough !
Now I can learn from your own lips——”

“ But that is not what I am here for,” he retorted.
“ I have not thrown every good resolution overboard,
to sit and simper and repeat what you must know
by heart already.”

“ Poor boy ! Tired of your fame, are you ? Surely
there must be some special details you have kept for
me ? ” she said, ignoring the real purport of his words
and looking at him through half-closed eyelids, with
the naughty, eager expression he knew so well—so well,
in fact, that it failed in its effect, and made him realise
that if *now* nothing but a trick, without any spon-
taneity or sincerity behind it, it must have been so
always !

Yet she looked temptingly lovely in her peach silk
kimono, the broad waistband supporting her bosom and
accentuating its delicate rounding ; the V-shaped,
open neck allowing the full throat to peep out, like a
bud bursting through its outer petals. Of her face
he could not get more than a vague, general outline,
though he was by this time sufficiently accustomed to
the semi-darkness to see her wonderful eyes sparkle,
and her fine teeth glitter, as she looked up at him and
talked and laughed.

“ What you did at Bisapo was fine ! ” she told him,
undaunted by his ill humour, the cause of which she
knew, and that her self-confidence told her she could
dispel at any moment. “ I have felt so proud of you—
inordinately, immensely proud. I could hardly help
saying to Henri : ‘ That is the man who loves me and
whom I gave up for you ! ’ I didn’t do it, though.

Let sleeping dogs lie. . . . But Bisapo was magnificent ! Fancy holding out for three days against their hundreds, with only a handful of—what do you call them ? ”

“ Prajurits,” Anton answered mechanically.

“ Prajurits ! That is the name, I knew it began with a P. They are not even regular soldiers, are they ? ”

“ Just policemen, native policemen, armed with rifles,” he explained, melting a little.

“ You had no soldiers with you at all ? ”

“ No. They came later, when the worst was over.”

“ Now, if that is not plucky, I should like to know what is ! And you saved all the stores, and a pile of Government money ? No wonder you have a decoration ! ”

“ My dear girl, let me tell you what I did at Bisapo was not worth a tenth of the fuss that has been made. Between ourselves, if the whole lot of us had been massacred, it would have been *my* fault and no one else’s.”

“ Is that not a little bit of false modesty ? ” she laughed.

“ Not an atom, on my word of honour. Through sheer imprudence I fell into a trap, and, if I struggled hard to get out and save my own skin as well as the others, it was only making the best of a bad job. It is a marvel how in the world we pulled through, but there was nothing heroic in it. If our antagonists had been better led, if they had been more dashing, I should not be here to tell the tale ; also, again, if I had been more prudent the whole thing would never have happened.

Against the advice of my friend Dommers I decided to march with the stores, which the expeditionary force was supposed to be in pressing need of, to Bisapo. Relying on information I had received that the interlying area was fairly safe, I thought that, by acting promptly, the risk of any serious encounter with marauding bands would be very small. As a matter of fact, soon after our start, I saw to my horror that we were followed by an ever-increasing, though mostly invisible, enemy. They did not attack in force, but every now and then, when they saw their chance, they had a pot at us. Had they had the spunk to stop us we should have been killed to a man; as it was, though we had several wounded, late in the evening we reached our destination. Now, we thought, all danger was over, but it had only just begun. The place—two stone buildings surrounded by a few dozen native houses—was deserted and not a sign of the soldiers we had reckoned upon finding to be seen. We had to prepare for a resolute resistance, as at any moment we might be desperately attacked. We thought ourselves mighty lucky that it did not come at once—that we were allowed to take possession of the two stone houses and transform them into the semblance of a fort. The native houses and huts in the immediate neighbourhood we burnt down, stripped the thatched roofs from our stronghold, and piled up rough galleries on the inside from which we could peep out and fire at every one who ventured into the space we had cleared."

Anton paused, to drink in every detail of Marie, as she sat before him. She was eagerly listening and motioned to him to continue.

"We had no great supply of ammunition," he went on, "and only a very little water, though the river Tino was so temptingly near that we could hear the splashing of its rapids. We were full of hope, however; rescue was at hand, and we had begun to look upon the whole adventure as a bit of good sport when, after a quiet night, at sunrise a horde of Goarese appeared, and the siege began in earnest. For hours they banged away at us from the cover of a wood, a couple of hundred yards away then, all at once, they swarmed into the open. It was an awful moment; we gave ourselves up for lost, when we were electrified by the sound of a bugle-call, followed by the appearance in the distance of a hundred odd regulars, under Captain Jullien.

"The enemy fled pell-mell, and our relief can be imagined. We had pulled through—but it was a narrow shave! . . . There you have the true history of Bisapo. I fought—metaphorically—with my back against a wall. If I had lost I should have been called a fool, or worse; now they dub me a hero!"

"And quite right too! Do you know what I should like to do? To kiss you for that brave deed and for your most interesting story."

"Why shouldn't you?" he said, stretching out his arms.

But again she shook her head. "No, no! Go on."

"There is nothing more to tell," he answered shortly.

But she was in the best of spirits. Rising she gave some touches to a large bunch of chrysanthemums, which seemed in imminent danger of toppling over in a vase that was too narrow at the base to preserve

its equilibrium. Then the red-heeled slippers beat the marble floor in an alluring staccato as she went to the venetian mirror to readjust a coiffure that appeared little in need of it. Contemplating her own image, she smiled.

"I hope you kept a diary," she said, sitting down in her dainty gilt chair. "When you are in Holland you must write it all out, and make a book of it. Promise! You might dedicate it to me—to my initials, M. D."

Her manner irritated him anew. "If ever I do any writing," he said, "it will be about things that will interest neither the general public nor you."

"Not interest *me*?"

"Experiences I feel rather proud of, but not calculated to strike the popular imagination. There will be little fighting in it—that I can assure you!"

"But, as a man, you like fighting?" She put it in the form of a question, but as one that required no answer.

"It all depends," he said. "Killing people, who after all are right in looking upon us as intruders, is not exactly nice, is it?"

She threatened him with her finger: "Oh, you! There you are again with your sentimentality. Always asking: Am I right?—am I wrong? My goodness! However, let's get to business. I have something to tell you. Are you prepared for a shock?"

Anton sat upright in his chair. She looked at him smilingly, but there was a nervous twitching round her lips, as if she were not sure how he would take the communication she was about to make to him. What

is coming? he wondered, in the interval that elapsed before she went on, evidently finding her words with some difficulty:

"I asked you to come—you are the first to hear—that is only fair. I am going to leave Henri—there!"

"Going to leave Delmaar?" Anton said mechanically. He stared helplessly at her for an explanation of how this incredible change had come to pass. Indulging in the keen pleasure of seeing him thus moved, she kept him in suspense for a moment. Then she proceeded:

"I don't mean that I shall run away. Everything will be settled properly. Of course people will talk, but—let them!" she concluded.

"Has he at last consented——?"

"Oh no! The beauty of it is, his consent is not required. He will be forced to bow to the inevitable. I am going to divorce him—what do you say to that?"

"You—divorce *him*?" Anton asked in bewilderment.

"Just so. Luckily our law gives me, the wife, an equal right with himself to claim my freedom, provided his misconduct can be proved. Henri, in his self-conceit, has never thought of that! One of these days he will have a rude awakening."

"But you don't mean that he has given *you* cause——?" Anton again laid an involuntary stress on the pronoun. But Marie ignored it.

"He has indeed. A woman in the *kampong* (native village). You are astonished; so was I when it first came to my ears, though on second thoughts, knowing him and men in general, I said to myself: It is only

natural. Isn't it beastly?" she went on, working herself into a passion that was not genuine. "Isn't it shameless? No one with any self-respect would stand it for a moment. I tried to ignore it, but how can I? My patience is exhausted."

"And when you demanded an explanation, what did he say?"

She gave Anton a look that clearly expressed: Oh, you naïve creature, what a child you are in diplomacy! before she answered:

"Explanation? I asked for none. The thing explained itself. I have not said a word to him. He shall have no chance of escaping. I saw my opportunity and took it. I went to Ollivier, the best lawyer in the place. Acting on his advice, I have not changed to Henri in the slightest. In the meantime Ollivier has been having Henri shadowed, and has collected evidence here and there; now, he tells me, we are perfectly sure; I can claim my divorce to-morrow."

"And Delmaar is still in the dark as to your intentions?" Anton asked, not without a faint note of protest, which, however, was lost on his hearer.

"That is to say, I am afraid he smells a rat. He has been extra friendly lately, unusually wedded to his home, and his visits to Kebong Djati* have suddenly ceased. But his remorse, or whatever it is, comes a little too late. Our case is complete. When he arrives home on Sunday—he has gone to Semarang to buy a motor car and means to return in it—he will find the cage empty and the bird flown. I shall leave a note informing him of my decision and telling him I have

* A Batavian suburb, mainly consisting of native villages.

gone to friends in Bandung till the thing is over. If he is wise he will not fight a lost cause, but will resign himself to his fate and agree to pay what he is in honour bound to allow me. Then I shall be free. *Free, Tony!* do you know what that means?" and she stretched out her arms as if to indicate that henceforth she would be unshackled—able to accept a happiness hitherto denied her.

With growing emotion Anton listened to her tale. Could it be true that at last the closed gates were to be flung wide open, that what had seemed Utopian would become reality? However far he had travelled since the days when she had been all in all to him, the old illusion—that she should be liberated from this ignoble bond and become his wife—overmastered him anew. He forgot all else for the moment.

"I suppose your freedom will not last long," he suggested, with dry lips, interpreting her smile in his own way. "I can hardly imagine you unmarried."

"Perhaps not—it all depends," she said, and he thrilled from head to foot as she looked at him.

CHAPTER XIX

MARIE'S last words, "It all depends!" kept ringing in Anton's ears with the force of a challenge. Now it was for him to speak, and—as a mere formality—ask her to become his wife as soon as might be.

Her whole attitude expressed her certainty that this was of course what he would do. She took up a book of photographs, evidently with no other object than to keep herself in countenance, for Anton noticed how she fumbled at the pages without looking at what was on them—then, closing the volume and holding it in her lap, she seemed to forget that it was there. With bent head, slightly turned away, it was clear that she was waiting, though she allowed him time to come to himself after the sensational news she had just imparted.

He could not let her wait too long. But the pity, the horror of it was that, his first elation at the prospect of her coming freedom over, a strange reaction set in. He could not bring himself to act as was expected. A "Steady, man! *Danger!*" seemed to rise from the bottom of his soul.

The tocsin once sounded, the shock he had received ceased in its effect. The thrill operated no longer—the spell was broken; while attracted by the alluring

vista conjured up, he suddenly—and not a moment too soon!—comprehended that it would never materialise for him. He passed his hand over his eyes—yes, he was wide awake, it was not a dream. But one peep round the corner of the wings and the scene showed itself bare and empty; the gorgeous castle he had gazed at was the result of paint, clever staging, and distance; on his approach it vanished.

How inexpressibly sad, tragic, appalling! Here he sat, motionless, torturing his brains for an expedient that might afford a means of escape from the terrible dilemma: either to ignore the warning of his deepest conviction or to shatter Marie's confidence at a single stroke, and make her hate and despise him for ever.

As, torn by this awful problem, he felt that already the right moment for an action that should be at once prompt and enthusiastic had passed by, a certain relief followed; for now there was but one course left open—to tell Marie straight out that what five years ago she had refused could never again be offered, that now marriage between them was out of the question.

It was not the thought of Annie Hartog that prompted his decision. During his present ordeal, from the moment Marie stood before him, Annie was totally forgotten, so exclusively did the possibility of a renewal of what was once the absorbing ambition of his life claim his attention, and so strong did the personal influence of her who for years had been to him the embodiment of feminine attraction still prove to be. The old colours under which he had sworn to serve called him back to his allegiance—a call he could not fail to respond to, though the hopelessness of the

enterprise immediately struck him. A timely retreat seemed the only alternative to certain disaster. To fight against such odds as faced them now would be madness.

Marie's powers of fascination seemed to have redoubled since he had recognised the painful necessity of being in honour bound to restrain the passion she rekindled. But the arguments advanced by his reason were too strong to be pushed aside. She would make an ideal mistress, he agreed ; while he was at the same time inwardly convinced that as a wife she would never do. She was like champagne—the perfect beverage for a feast ; but not for everyday life, because of its intoxicating qualities. For one of those attachments that can be tied and loosened at will she seemed amazingly fitted, but to the idea of making her the partner of his life, a host of objections arose—no, in that rôle she would be a failure.

Sweet as it would be to bury the past, except for the rapturous hours it had given him—to forget misgivings and suspicions and tread again the Arcadian fields they had once walked together, the gates of that Paradise were closed to them for ever. Arcady was not for mortals here below—poor humanity must perforce be satisfied with a sprinkling of happiness strewn over an immense area.

Alas, where was the young, reckless spirit, the blind faith, the dauntless optimism that should enable him to rise superior to a prosaic, terribly well-planned world ? Gone, gone for ever ! The final chapter of their romance could never be rewritten. Fate itself had rudely traced a hurried " *Finis* " after it.

Ah, if by some miracle Marie could appear to him like new, brand-new, a stranger, detached from her old self ! Or if *he* could become another man than the one who had seen and felt too much ! Yes, *if*. . . .

But facts spoke too strongly against her. They had cut too deeply into his heart to allow him to shut his eyes to what stood out in such clear relief before them.

He was disagreeably impressed by the way she intended to attack Delmaar unexpectedly, from behind, so to say ; but as long as the husband doggedly refused to release her, what else could she do but cut herself free, against his will and in a way that left him no chance to frustrate her efforts ?

Then there were her intrigues with others. He would not blame her too much for these, preferring to look upon them as inevitable in a life that was no doubt wretched and abnormal, however bravely she might try to bear it.

But what he could never forget, never, was that at the critical moment of their tragic union she had failed him. How could she ever wipe out the stain of, after what had passed between herself and him, choosing to remain with Delmaar, the legal husband, the usurper ?

No man with any sense of self-respect could think of wedding a woman who, in the hour of trial, had deserted the common cause, proving herself too weak or too frivolous to shoulder the consequences of her previous actions. Such failings were fundamental and could never be completely rooted out. Dignity, honour, if nothing more, should have compelled Marie

to leave Delmaar the moment she had pledged herself, not alone in words but also in deeds, to another. It was the only course for her to take, quite apart from the fact that he, Anton, was waiting to receive her, and that she had proclaimed him the one being she had ever loved or would ever care for.

In spite of her charm, her piquant personality, a woman who could thus betray her lover and herself was only adapted for a fleeting happiness, could give no more than a short-lived ecstasy to the man who came under her spell. A sympathy so frail, an understanding, so skin-deep was a poor asset on which to found a partnership for life! At the first serious mishap the illusion would break like a bubble.

But he *must* speak! Dreadful as the message was, it had to be delivered. He could leave her no longer under the delusion that it was his inability to find words in which to express his joy, that lamed his tongue.

Marie made a movement—of impatience, no doubt. Anton glanced at her furtively. She had clasped both hands behind her neck, and the wide sleeves of her kimono fell away, leaving the fine, round arms bare. Then, her head thrown back, she looked at him:

"Well?" she said with a languid smile.

He felt a brute for having to disturb such equanimity. But there was no other choice—he was in honour bound to deal her a mortal blow.

Rising, he cleared his throat; abandoning his first impulse to begin with an expression of regret, he straightway formulated the inexorable resolution he had come to.

"I cannot marry you, Marie—I wish to God I could, but I cannot!"

Then he waited, looking away, his hands boyishly stuck in the side-pockets of his coat, and steadying himself by assuming a rigid attitude. He must be firm, or he was lost. Even now he felt a wild desire to add: "And yet I will!"

Dead silence followed. Without turning he saw her unclasp her hands, slowly lower her arms, get up. Bang! came the book that fell from her lap on the floor, making him think for a second that she had thrown it down in anger.

A much more dreadful explosion, he felt, was sure to follow; but nothing came.

She moved towards him. His dread became a panic. Idiotically he asked himself if she were going to strike him! Then, to his inexpressible relief, in soft, sweet tones, wondering, but with no trace of irritation:

"You cannot marry me?" he heard her ask. "Poor me! And—why not, Tony dear?"

The ironical note quickly brought him to himself. Too bad that she should address him thus, as a naughty child whom with a little tact and patience she could easily put right.

He bit his lips, standing tall and dignified, but made no reply.

"Come, tell me!" she insisted.

"There are several reasons—but I see no use in giving them."

"But you *must*, my dear boy! You can't put me off that way."

"I shrink from the responsibility of making you happy. There—is that enough?"

"Not at all! Besides, is it true? Are you sincere? Do you really rate your capacity of bringing happiness into a woman's life so low?"

He shrugged his shoulders, as if to say: "If you don't believe me, what can I do?"

"Is it not rather *my* inability to make *you* happy that makes you so very—how shall we put it—cautious?"

The suggestion came upon Anton with an electrifying effect. "And supposing that were so—*à qui la faute?*" he exclaimed.

"*Mine*, you mean?" Marie asked, smiling still, but with knitted brows.

"Whose else?"

"Not *yours*, of course! Oh no!"

"How can you! When I was eager to receive you! To start a new life with you I would have given up everything."

"Would you indeed? 'Everything' includes a great deal."

"If you had stuck to me *then*——"

"We should be miserable *now*! On your own showing."

"Excuse me! That insight I only came to because you failed me, preferring to remain where you were. Had you lived up to the situation . . . But that was just it: you could not! At the eleventh hour you deserted me—when we were practically husband and wife already."

A long-drawn "Ah!" came from Marie. "At last

we know where we are ! " she exclaimed. Her cheerful mien left her ; she became very serious as she went on : " Now I must say a few things that you will not like, I am afraid. But of course I cannot leave it there. What you accuse me of is terrible. If I strike back you have only yourself to blame."

" Fire away ! " Anton said, with an indifferent air.

Inwardly her decisive manner impressed him not a little. He himself, he was sure, had greatly profited by his five years' absence, but Marie seemed to have benefited too. She had greatly changed. He tried in vain to see in her the thoughtless flirt, the mere butterfly he had come to picture her. She struck him as considerably ripened, as quite able to hold her own in their discussion.

" So you still blame me for not having risked everything and followed you ? "

" You cannot expect me to admire you for it, can you ? "

" No, but you should at least be fair. Did it ever occur to you, I wonder, that, even if I did not love you enough to leave Henri and come to you, this, in itself, would not give you the right to despise me ? "

" Not in itself, quite so ! But in connection with what we had done——"

" There I made a great mistake. I should not have gone so far—I agree."

The frank admission touched Anton on the raw. However natural it seemed that under the circumstances she should regret their past intimacy, to hear her confess it thus openly was torture.

" You did it all for love of me," he ventured

soothingly, in an impulse to plead his own cause as well as hers.

"That is so. I honestly believed that I loved you deeply. It was not until later I came to the conclusion that I had done a foolish thing, that I had carried the experiment too far and, instead of increasing your love for me, had actually diminished it. It is the most painful discovery a woman can make."

"Carried the experiment too far? What do you mean?"

"If I had not been disappointed in you I should never have regretted what had happened."

"You disappointed in *me*! That is an entirely new idea!" Anton ejaculated, not knowing whether to be furious or to treat the imputation that he had been a failure as a lover as a joke, and one very much out of place.

"To *you*, maybe! I came to that conclusion years ago."

"May I ask when?"

"Not at once, of course, but gradually. When it kept me from running away from Henri it was only a vague instinct, but, ever since, my conviction has grown that I was right, and that you are not the man I first took you for!"

"Well, you are at least outspoken!" Anton said bitterly.

"I am very, very sorry to have to hurt your feelings—but after your own frank statement. I did not begin!"

"So it is out of revenge that you are telling me this—to my face?"

" Oh no ! Though I should have spared you, if you had not broached the subject."

" You are sure it did not strike you as an over-thought ? "

" Quite sure ! As I told you already, it made me instinctively stay where I was at the moment when I had to decide."

" Will you please explain exactly *what* it was made you regret what you did for me ? "

" Why I was disappointed in you, you mean ? "

" If you prefer to put it that way."

" What is the good of raking it all up again ? Hadn't we better let it be ? "

" No, no ! " Anton exclaimed in vehement tones.

Marie's hesitation brought him on the wrong tack. She was trying to get away from it for the simple reason that she had invented the whole thing out of pique, on the spur of the moment, and was now at a loss how to substantiate her absurd accusations.

Marie shrugged her shoulders. " If you really want to know——" she began, then stopped short.

" Having said so much, you must go on," Anton reminded her, with a sarcastic smile, the expression of his inner satisfaction that he was making it so hot for her.

" Well, if you insist. It was your attitude to Henri when he came back from Singapore that did it. You had made it impossible for me to refuse you anything, and from that moment the situation completely changed. You are right—what I did, I did for love of you, in the certainty that on you I could rely, that, however high the price circumstances might place on

my possession, you would be ready to pay it. I had pledged myself to you, had severed myself from Henri. I was sure you would step in and protect me against any claim, any danger from that side. It was here that you proved a broken reed, and this, in the long run, modified my feelings. Instead of being stimulated to immediate action, you seemed to be paralysed by Henri's return. It was as if, once satisfied, you no longer wanted me with the same fervour that had induced me to throw myself into your arms and place myself at your mercy. Instead of having but one idea, one wish, to secure me for good, to wrest me from the rival I loathed, you reproached yourself and me! You looked upon Henri as our *victim*; you spoke to me—think of it, *to me!*—of your remorse for the wrong you had done him! Could anything be poorer, in more flat contradiction to what you had made me believe—that you were devoted to me heart and soul, unconditionally, and for ever? It opened my eyes—too late. I could not repair my mistake, but it made me stay where I was——”

“And continue to live with the man you say yourself you loathed!” Anton interrupted her, losing his self-control.

“That is *my* affair!” Marie retorted curtly.

The furious look she gave Anton showed only too plainly how his words had gone home. There was a short, tense silence. The atmosphere had become quite different. The former lovers faced each other with flushed cheeks and flashing glances, then avoided each other's gaze, as though it were too painful to read in the beloved's eyes the doom of what might have been.

Yet their grievances were too actual for them to leave the dispute unfinished. The opportunity to air them, after all the years of enforced forbearance, appealed too strongly to their mutual resentment and vindictiveness.

"In other words, I behaved like a coward," Anton resumed the discussion. "According to you, I ought to have murdered Delmaar, I suppose," and he laughed scornfully.

"You should have gone for him like a man and without consulting me till you had settled your account with him; not have left me the hardest, ugliest part to do, on the pretext that in the relation between him and me you could not interfere, while, by making me your own, you had already, and quite rightly, ignored it!"

"And what in the world could I have done without causing a terrible scandal, the thing that at the time you so much dreaded?"

"That was for *you* to find out. All I know is——"

But again Anton did not let her finish. The injustice of the accusation was too monstrous, too unbearable.

"I call it downright mean of you," he vehemently protested, "to attack me in this way, for things you know were beyond my power to cope with!"

"You cannot deny that the whole adventure lost much of its flavour when it came to the point of running risks yourself? Don't pretend that you played the game, for you did not. Perfectly satisfied with your conquest, you evidently thought: The rest is *her* look-out, not mine!"

"Satisfied! I? Good God! I was in despair at

having to give you up—at your leaving me in the cold ! ”

“ *Afterwards*, yes. But not when you should have forced Henri to relinquish his claim. How could I trust myself to, and give up every one and everything for a man who had neither the initiative nor the dash to act for himself and say : ‘ Either you leave her to me, or one of us must go ! ’ ”

“ A duel to the death, you mean ? ”

“ Why not ? Was I not worth it ? But it would not have come to that. Once convinced that you were in earnest, Henri would have made the best of a bad job—take my word for it ! But—you did not stir.”

“ And supposing he had accepted the challenge and I had killed him ? ”

“ Then you would have had to fly the country. But I should have gone with you.”

“ And—if he had killed me ? ”

“ It would have been awful. I should have been broken-hearted. But even that would have been better than this. *This* is the most miserable end a glorious, unique experience like ours can come to ! You would have acted as a hero—for my sake you would have fallen in battle royal, paying the price required to secure me.”

“ Without securing you at all ! ”

“ Would you have stopped to think of that, if your love had been what I deemed it ? ”

Anton smiled sarcastically. He walked away from her, whistling a bar of a popular tune. Suddenly breaking off, he came back.

“ This is madness, rubbish, nonsense ! ” he burst

out. "You may delude yourself into the belief that the *love* was mine, but you will not catch *me*. I know too well the real state of affairs, and why you quietly dropped me for Delmaar after all!"

"Why?" Marie asked defiantly.

"If I had been the richer of the two, you would have found my love quite sufficient."

"I suppose that verdict ought to crush me! It is unfair and spiteful enough. But it only confirms me in my belief that, once your precious vanity is wounded, you stick at nothing in the way of imputations. The moment I tell you frankly that my love for you was dealt a deadly blow, you are ready to say to yourself: 'A poor sort of love it must have been!'"

"If you gave me a better explanation," Anton said, "of your attitude, I should not come to such conclusions. It is too absurd, the way you misconstrue the state of things as they were *then*. Is it possible," he went on, assuming a persuasive tone that came as a relief after the hard truths just exchanged, "that you should have forgotten how you made me pledge my word *not* to speak to Delmaar—how you besought me to avoid all possibility of scandal? Don't you remember telling me that he had threatened to shoot me like a dog, if ever I gave him the chance by entering his house again?"

For a moment Marie seemed impressed by the irrefutable argument. Then, in exalted tones, she replied:

"If I did, you should have ignored it! You should have broken your word if I made you pledge it to keep out of harm's way. Your instinct should have told

you you would lose me for ever by standing aloof like that."

' And your fear of scandal? Your dread of having to give up your relatives and friends, your social position? All forgotten—for the sake of scoring a point against me! "

For a second she looked daggers, till her anger turned to lamentation, as she replied:

" You should have forced me to risk it all! You should have read between the lines and made me face the accomplished fact! That is how a woman's heart is won—not by waiting, not by bowing to the inevitable. I should have forgiven you everything, followed you everywhere, left everyone. Ah, Tony"—she interrupted herself in an outburst of sadness—" why did you not *act*? How could I help feeling deserted and ill-used when you stopped half-way, or deplore having gone so far when you said yourself you were ashamed of what you had made me do—that it was sinful and could only end in disaster? What love could live under such treatment, I ask you? "

" I see," Anton said bitterly. " But, to give the opposite view: if only you had looked upon yourself as mine and acted accordingly, if only you had left Delmaar at once, the moment he returned from Singapore, how different things would have been! I would have shown you quite another man than the poor soul you made yourself believe I was. I would have sacrificed everything, and fought for our common cause unflinchingly."

" Are we to go on indefinitely accusing one another? "

" It is useless. I quite agree."

The heated discussion had brought no satisfaction, only pain. A reaction followed that left both disgusted with themselves, and sore and sad. At intervals, from the roadside, came the regular click-clack of the wooden clapper, sounded with insistent regularity by a native hawker; and, near by, from the garden below, the metallic chirp of a chorus of crickets; while Anton caught himself mechanically counting the measured calls of a *gecko*,* that herald of evil, rising as it seemed from the farthest corner of the house and beating the air with its ominous: "Toc-ké-e-e! toc-ké-e-e!" by which one is able to ascertain the number of years one has still to live!

"I had better go," Anton said to himself, as the silence became oppressive; though the idea of leaving Marie, with the remembrance of this painful conflict of opinion still fresh in her mind, seemed unbearable.

He stopped and gazed at her. She stood resting her arms on the piano and had sunk her head in her hands, evidently lost in a mournful reverie. Suddenly she looked up.

"I ought never to have given in to you till I had freed myself from Henri," she said, with trembling lips, in a soft, small voice.

"I thought we were not to discuss it any longer. What is the good of accusing yourself?" he told her.

"You are right," she answered, looking at him with a forced smile.

"A new life lies before you. You will marry again. I hope you will find a better man than myself to trust to."

* A kind of lizard.

"And I hope," she murmured, "that you will be happy too, and will find the woman of your choice. Now is your chance. Once in Europe——" Her words were to Anton a sharp reminder. For the first time since he was there he thought of Annie; and the recollection, with all it implied, was most unwelcome. He hastily banished it to the innermost recesses of his mind—the present affair must first be settled. Before taking final leave of Marie there was one thing he wished to ascertain.

"I wonder why you wanted me to come?" he remarked.

His words brought her back from another mental excursion. "It was because I have something to ask you—a favour. It will not cost you much, but it means a lot to me. Have you ever spoken about us to anyone?"

"Of course not. The idea!"

"You might have told your sister Jeannette, for instance."

"Well—I did," he admitted.

"So the idea was not so absurd after all," Marie said, and it was evident that she was keenly hurt.

"I don't see how I could help it. Five years ago, while my agony at having to give you up was still at its height, I stayed with her for several weeks. She nursed me, so to say, for I was in despair. How could I have recovered without confiding in her some part——"

"I am sorry, very sorry, all the same. But perhaps you are right and it was unavoidable. Who else have you told?"

"No one."

"Not your most intimate friend? Your host, Mr. van Eelde, for instance?" and she looked at him sharply.

"I should not think of such a thing!" he said emphatically.

"And you never will?"

"Never!"

"On your word of honour?"

"On my word of honour!"

"Thank you," and she heaved a deep sigh of relief. Then, by way of explanation, and somewhat confused, she added: "That is what I wanted to hear from your own lips. That is why I asked you if you still cared for me, if I could look upon you as a friend. Now that I know our secret is safe— It would be awful, wouldn't it, if the outside world should ever know? Not that I have to give account to anyone——"

"Oh no!" Anton hastily agreed. Rather awkwardly he continued: "I suppose I must go. Is there anything I can do for you? Any messages for Holland?" and he held out his hand.

She took it and drew him towards her. In a spontaneous, charming impulse she clasped it in both her own.

So they stood for a moment, facing each other with eyes from which all fierceness, all animosity had disappeared. Likewise the feeling of restraint, of unnaturalness, as if they were ashamed of having nothing but cold, reproachful glances to bestow, had vanished.

Was it the sharp contrast between their ancient affection and the violent accusations just exchanged,

or the sudden realisation that the moment of farewell had come and that it would be for good, that made Anton in his turn seize the little hands and press them as if he could never let them go, and bend his head as he told himself this was surely the last time he would touch them? And what mysterious agency made Marie, who had just lectured him on his failings as a lover, break into silent tears that rolled slowly down her cheeks, one after the other?

Was it indeed all over between them or was it only just beginning? Were these two, after all these years, in spite of their terrible experiences, to be allowed to pick up the red thread that bound their lives together, and that a moment ago seemed snapped for ever?

For an indivisible part of the course of Time they seemed, as once before, at their first meeting as lovers, to be left to themselves, beyond the sphere of Life and its striving, for a flash the old illusion was there: perfect happiness, oblivion of Past and Future, detachment from responsibility, care or worry!

In this infinitely short fragment of Eternity they yet found space to travel back to that glorious sensation of five years previously—to see each other as they did then, to long for mutual absorption, as in that moment when she, rising from the piano, had laid these same little hands in his, and he had stammered:

“For ever!”

Two minutes later Anton heard his own steps on the marble flags of the front veranda, on his way to the stairs outside.

He felt as if it were his second self, who had just been in that room behind him! Marie might close the green slatted doors on his outward person—that other would be always there, with her and about her.

And how poor the man walking away seemed, deprived of the one left to bear her company, who was so much the richer, the more interesting, the finer of the two!

"I shall have to do without her as well as I can," he sighed naïvely; and he staggered as he went, as if some one had just mercilessly thrashed him.

CHAPTER XX

ANTON strode away through the garden, and out along the road, in a kind of stupor. Not until he climbed the bridge did the heat, which had enveloped him the moment he reached the open, strike him as insufferable. Now, however, it roused him to the inevitable question : " What next ? "

First, of course, he must hail a dogcart, to convey him to the point in front of Eigen-Hulp, where he would take the tram to the lower town, Batavia proper. He had to be there for various reasons, and his time was growing short. The interview with Marie had practically taken up the whole morning and quite upset his programme ; but for that he would have finished his business and got comfortably back before one o'clock ; now he had to face the journey in the hottest hours of the day. However, he could make straight for the new tiffin rooms he was told had been started in the City, have lunch there and settle his affairs directly afterwards. Great as was the temptation to drive round and change his serge coat and starched linen collar for the plain white duck he felt so much more at home in, he finally decided to remain as he was. He could afford no more delay.

Though, as a rule, on any of the Batavia roads

vehicles in plenty ply for hire, now there was not a single *sado* * or *kosong* † to be seen ; he had no other choice than to walk on, down Tanah-Abang. Here the canal was bordered by a row of trees, though the shade they afforded was but scanty ; further on there were no trees at all and the remainder of the route leading straight to the tram lines in the distance looked anything but inviting : a vista of dust and heat, intensified by the reflection of the sunbeams from a seemingly endless vista of dazzling white frontages. Before venturing into this furnace Anton hesitated, and again cursed his fate at not seeing an available conveyance, when some natives in black *toros*—the long shirt or cassock usually worn by coachmen and grooms—suddenly blocked his way, by bringing out a hearse from the livery stables just in front of him. The sight of the melancholy chariot—like the monstrous carcase of some pre-historic black-beetle—suggested the luminous idea : Why not order a victoria and pair, and drive in comfort all the way down ? It was the very thing ! The prospect of the ride in the tram did not appeal to him ; he wanted privacy and whatever rest he could get, after the stirring emotions he had gone through.

He stepped inside and stated his requirements to the man who came forward to attend to him.

While waiting in the fairly cool, large hall, passing slowly up and down between a couple of motor cars and a group of vehicles of an older period, all dozing under their white covers in a peaceful chiaroscuro,

* *Dos-à-dos*, or native dogcart.

† Means "empty," i.e., unoccupied.

he could find no mental escape from the stirring drama just enacted. But the interval, however short, as well as the slight physical exertion, had already wrought a substantial change in Anton's general appreciation of what had happened. He agreed that he ought to be thankful for the merciless stamping out of the last embers of his former madness. And he *was* thankful, he inwardly declared—very thankful indeed.

The operation just undergone had been extremely painful, but absolutely necessary, if he was ever to be restored to health again. Now that it was over, he assured himself, he felt another man; somewhat tired and shaky, but in full expectation of a complete recovery.

He gave a sigh of relief. There were other and better things in life than chimeras like these; things you could live and work and suffer for, and see results of, and find satisfaction in. The delusion in which he had so long lived, which had so unexpectedly popped up again, that the possession of *this* particular woman was essential to his happiness, was too absurd for words. How strange and humiliating, how unaccountable the old superstition looked when properly examined! He had made up his mind it should be shaken off for good—he would not give it another thought; whatever in his past had the slightest connection with Marie must be forgotten. The idol was broken—the Past was dead. He grimly pictured it being carried off to be buried in that grotesque funeral carriage yonder.

At this moment the victoria he had ordered emerged from the back of the premises into the open; he need

lose no further time. The native coachman—a wiry little fellow, a tall hat with a cockade planted on the top of his *kain kabala*—was perched high on the box. He, also, wore a long, tight *toro*, similar to those of his comrades busy with the hearse; but in his case, as well as in that of the *syce* or groom who stood at the horses' heads while Anton got in, the primitive livery was not black, but light and dark blue striped. The toes of his bare feet, projecting from tight dark serge trousers widening at the base—that smart note of the 'seventies!—were widely spread, to assist him in keeping his balance on his lofty seat. The whole figure made Anton pause for a second, to take stock of a type he would look in vain for when in Europe. The man held his reins in the nonchalant, happy-go-lucky way characteristic of the East; they lay loosely in his brown, bony hand, as if he were ready to give them over at any moment to whoever might enjoy the job more than he. Yet his *battas*—a Sumatra breed, generally qualified as *dienst-doeners* or “slaveys” among the four-footed servants on account of their fitness for steady hard work on a minimum of food—seemed much in awe of him and of his very long whip, quaintly decorated with spangles and tiny bunches of horsehair.

Sturdy little chaps these ponies are; high-spirited, notwithstanding their humble status in the equestrian world, and reliable, though sometimes obstinate and often mischievous. As the pair stood, restless and fidgeting, their sand-coloured coats seemed equally suited to the glare of the sun and the dust of the road; the heavy harness—a striking feature of the whole

turn-out—impressed the onlooker as well proportioned to their strong, short necks. They had dark, bushy manes, and long tails, with which they constantly swished away the flies that attacked their compact, round bodies. But the *syce* with his *sapu lalang*, a special fly-whisk, had to assist in the attack; even so it was difficult to keep the pests at bay.

Anton wormed his tall self through the small space left by the low-hanging hood into the carriage. He could only get in sideways, and by bending nearly double; but, once established on the broad linen-covered seat beneath the two feet square opening in the leather wall behind him, he felt comfortable, well-protected against the sun and able to glance at the outside world, though, in order to see anything clearly, he had to lean forward and peep round the hood, at the cost of a slight contortion of the neck.

The *syce* stood on a plank or step between the two hind wheels at the back—somewhat as a toastmaster holds himself erect behind "the chair." There was ample room for his bare feet, and with ape-like agility he could at once jump off whenever there was trouble with the ponies, to resume his place as soon as all was again plain sailing with the little rascals.

Off they started, with the impetus of animals half-broken and badly trained; but hardly had they covered a hundred yards, when Anton stopped the charioteer by poking him gently in the back. Instead of going straight to the lower town, he would follow Noordwijk and stop at the tailor's and at Daendels', the shipping agents, whence they could take the straight road along the Molenvliet canal that links upper and

lower town together, cutting through a quieter and at the same time better shaded district.

"*Saja, Kandjeng !*" (at your service, my lord !) was the answer ; and, with a clap of his whip that made the *battas* bound forward, the queer-looking coachman resumed the journey.

It was only to see if any letters had come for him that Anton wished to call at Daendels'. Letters from —Annie, of course.

Annie ! The name put a sudden stop to the comforting reflection that, after all, he was none the worse for the interview with Marie ! Any attempt at self-justification was nipped in the bud by the startling discovery that the girl he was practically engaged to would be, to put it mildly, by no means pleased at what had passed between his old love and himself. There was no denying it, for hours and hours Annie had been shamelessly forgotten and her claim on him ignored. Now he was ready enough to restore her to the place of honour ; but the harm was done—he had laid himself open to severe criticism, if nothing more. The sudden revelation that it was neither Marie Delmaar nor his feeling for her that really mattered, but Annie and what *she* thought of him, only increased his remorse ; while the thought that for weeks and weeks to come Annie must still remain in total ignorance of what had taken place lent an additional nasty aspect to the whole affair.

Through the mists of distance and long separation Annie's features appeared vaguely ; but their general expression was significant enough. As if to ward off a well-aimed blow he made a sudden gesture ; then,

sinking his head in his hand, he tried to find some way out of the frightful *impasse* in which he had landed himself.

Why, however, should Annie ever hear of it? Why not, as he had already told Jeannette and also Marie that he would do, keep what had just happened strictly secret?

After all, he had only gone to see Marie because she had asked him! "Now is that true?" an inward voice came. "I wanted to settle things with her!" he answered; but the other was not to be so easily put off. "Settle what?" was the next question. "Were things not settled between you long ago?" Till poor Anton got quite angry, swearing that he was disgusted with the whole affair. "Hanged if I worry any longer!" he impatiently exclaimed.

Then, cheering up again, he sent to his far-off love a long, silent greeting. He had but one idea: to call at Daendels', where he had told her to address any letters she thought might reach him in Batavia.

Though not with the excessive speed of Govert's runabout, and not half quickly enough for Anton in his anxiety to get his correspondence, the victoria rolled swiftly past the shops where last night he had left van Eelde. Here almost all the names on awnings and sign-boards were French; the whole street seemed taken up by members of the French colony, represented by milliners, bakers, hair-dressers, dress-makers, and tailors. The shops were all on the same side; the goods in the windows were covered up against the glare, without much damage to their

owners' interests, as at this hour passers-by likely to be attracted by "Articles de Paris," "Pain d'épice," or "Eau de toilette à la Reine Hortense" were few and far between.

The *battas'* tiny hoofs sounded on the macadamised road in a quick, nervous *tempo*. The motion sent a light breeze through the hooded carriage, giving its inmate the illusion of a caressing coolness, emphasised by the strong contrast between the delightful gloaming within and the scorching heat outside.

Anton felt as though enclosed in some fantastic submarine, floating through waves of vibrating matter, sparkling with gold-dust, luminous as the waters of the Pacific and, like these, obscured every now and then by islands of the deepest gloom, where, under overhanging rocks or in the fathomless reaches of a submerged crater, the spell of light was abruptly broken and that of darkness as suddenly brought into play.

Here whatever colour there was struck a higher note in the chromatic scale where the sun seized it; when left to itself it sank to a lower key. Brown grew red and black became grey, while yellow paled to cream in the blinding radiance; but directly beneath the massive crowns of the trees and the flaming crimson roofs of some white houses were patches of cobalt and bold stretches of blackish violet, as if an impressionist of exceptional daring had been entrusted with the decoration of the scene.

A portico, brick and plaster, without any ornament; a door-opening, the roughest frame, with its door ajar; an awning, listlessly hanging from a whitewashed

wall but lending it some mystery by the partial concealment, seemed ridiculously overvalued ; still, amidst the blinding waves of light they held their own. Whatever gable, hut, or shed showed a sheltered interior became for the time being exalted, ennobled, and worth entering, if only with the mental eye ; under the bridges, where the boon appeared strikingly out of place, were stored treasures of shadow, while a world of sweetest suggestion hung in the mighty folds of a venerable tree. Opposite the giant stood a lonely *warong* (native shop), small of dimensions and poor of contents, but with its lower half, where the light fell, standing out in gorgeous colour, and the upper transformed into a haunt of marvel, almost too rudely suggested in the blue haze that glimmered below the rough, thatched roof.

On the footpaths the few Europeans were either alighting from their carriages or buggies, or getting in and driving away. In front of a jeweller's Anton's eye suddenly fell upon an old acquaintance, Dr. Wieleman, the Nestor of Batavian physicians, who, to his surprise, recognised him too, and before re-entering his *plankie*, a sort of sedan chair on wheels, waved his hand, as if it were only yesterday that they had parted. " Queer old chap ! " Anton muttered. " Does he never think of going back to Europe, I wonder ? "

In the road the heat had brought the traffic almost to a standstill ; but the trams were in full swing, steaming along the worn track. One set of cars just arrived from town disgorged a group of Europeans, men, women, and children, evidently on their way from Priok and accompanied by *djongos*, *ayahs*, and

native porters, who hastily crossed to the hotel opposite, anxious to reach the relative coolness of its rooms.

Of natives there was still a good sprinkling to be seen, though not half as many as in the cooler hours of the morning and evening. A water-cart in the foreground was scattering its contents, while three or four almost naked figures completed the work, by slowly emptying the tubs hanging from their bronzed shoulders on parts that the big implement of war failed to reach. A well-born Javanese, in white duck and sun-helmet, but with sandalled feet and the native *sarong* just peeping out from under his tightly fitting jacket, made for the tram in a mixture of dignity and hurry, a gold-topped cane in the one hand and a Japanese sunshade in the other. Here was a mounted policeman, and there, on a bicycle, another, huge portfolios containing goodness knows what important missives under their arms, reminding Anton that he was in the centre of officialdom ; and, finally, a swarm of " boys," taking their masters' lunch to town, for all the business men whose offices are situated in lower Batavia are accustomed to tiffin in their offices. The food is sent them from their respective homes in *tempat makanans*, special food-carriers, consisting of half a dozen deepround dishes, like cake-tins, only in enamelled ware, closely fitting one upon the other, in a metal frame with a handle at the top and with room underneath and all round for boiling water, to keep the curry and rice, the meat and fish, the *sajoerans* and *sambals*, each in its separate compartment, as hot as possible. How vividly the sight of these curious contrivances brought back to Anton the days when he

himself was employed at the Central Bureau, and had to pick his meal out of similar dishes, arranged on a small worm-eaten table near his desk; with a long glass of iced water to drink, and a few bananas, *shrikajas* or *ramboetans*, a mango or a pineapple as a finish.

Not a few members of the native community scattered over the scene appeared to be in a state of momentary collapse. Whatever relief the—still far-off—evening might bring, it seemed wiser to accept things as they came, without any fuss, without a sound or a gesture! Some of them were sitting on their heels, or lying at full length wherever a bit of shadow tempted to forty and more winks. Others, less indolent, stood in twos and threes at the edge of the canal, talking finance or women, or silently smoking *sroetoes*, stinking native cigarettes; but not a few had gathered round a *tukang* * *saté*, dispensing roasted meat stuck in neat squares on thin pieces of bamboo (*saté*). A Chinese *bami*† seller—who as good conservative still wore his pigtail—and a vendor of lemonades and sorbets of most amazing colours, each drew a separate batch of customers that filled the space on either side of the enormous stem of an ancient tree, which leant against a still older dwelling. Despite the heat and the smell of singed fat, sharp tobacco-smoke, and fruit, mingled with perfumes of a more offensive nature, a large amount of business seemed to be transacted, though always in a slow, dull way—always under the leaden weight of a scorching heat, emanating from the soil as well as poured down from the heavens.

* Pedlar or hawker, also an artisan in general.

† A rich concoction of vermicelli, pork, shrimps, onions, etc.

At Daendels' Anton's heart beat with joy when the clerk told him there *was* a letter, and went to fetch it. How his face fell when it turned out to be only a post-card. It was from Annie right enough, but conveyed—quite naturally—nothing but sober facts. A few days ago, she said, she had written him at length, and had sent it to Macassar. On second thoughts she doubted whether she had been wise. Had it reached him in time?

Anton felt greatly annoyed. No, of course it had not reached him. How disgusting! That was always the way with women—they could never follow your instructions! How stupid of her, how easily could this disappointment have been spared him. But his good temper soon returned. After all, it was for *his* sake that she had risked it, in order that her message might reach him as soon as possible. It must have been unusually long on the way. No, no, it was not her fault. It was the post, of course, that was to blame.

But where was that letter now? He had better wire to Beekveldt to ask if it had arrived, whether it had been sent on, and when. It might perhaps get here this evening or to-morrow, just in the nick of time.

Re-entering the victoria, he told the coachman to drive to the telegraph office near by. Five minutes later he had written out the telegram and handed it in.

Now the carriage, turning away from the new town, deliberately made for the old one, along Pasar Senen, a district so-called after the *pasar* or market held here, for a century and more, every Monday.

The primitive, ramshackle stalls of the original *pasar* had long been replaced by stone buildings, and the narrow street was lined with houses, standing right on the road, without any garden in front of them. Nearly all contained shops, some with an upper storey mostly used as a warehouse ; and all were occupied by either Chinese or Arab tradesmen. Again the contrast between the two races, the sons of Fukien and those of Hadramaut, forcibly struck Anton. In the former—who had often never seen China at all—was a strong admixture of native blood ; though curiously enough the strongly marked characteristics of the race seemed thereby hardly affected. The Chinaman was more sociable than the Arab, and in his way a man of the world ; the followers of the Prophet, however keen on profit-making and successful in its pursuit, were seriously handicapped in their intercourse with others by the prejudice and hatred springing from an inborn surliness and misanthropy. They lacked kindness, confidence, and generosity ; they were mean, shabby, and suspicious in their dealings with the non-Mohammedan population.

To be frugal, sober, and reserved is not in itself enough to take one to the top of the tree. Besides, the unscrupulousness and dishonesty put into practice against the *Giaour*—the inevitable outcome of a creed boldly based on privilege and weighing with uneven scales—made the true sons of Allah little in demand as business connections, still less as friends ; the big Dutch firms preferred to pass them by. The Chinese trader, on the contrary, though by no means free from contempt for outsiders, was rarely intolerant,

and never fanatic. His nature was more open, more kindly disposed. In conviviality and friendly intercourse he saw no danger, indeed he employed them with success ; they kept him well informed as to what his clients wanted, and how best to cater for their needs. He seemed endowed with a special and very strong instinct as to where his real interests lay ; and had, in his dealings with the masterful European, pursued the wise policy of being upright and true to his word.

Anton had always, in the main, appreciated the Chinese. Whenever their outlook was not barred by their inveterate conventionalism there was something jovial and intelligent about them ; while the enormous service their race had—however indirectly and unintentionally—rendered to his own, by providing an indispensable link between the small official band of conquerors and the enormous mass of the conquered, could not in fairness be forgotten.

Without this half-million of Celestials—at least semi-civilised—the colony in these parts would lose a large portion of its vitality, its picturesqueness, its capacity for strenuous hard work, he thought. They were in the main, of course, descendants of the scum of the great yellow nation ; but as a whole they had done well in their adopted country. Physically, however, they inspired him with a secret aversion. At this moment, for instance, his eye fell on a short, fat figure—an evidently wealthy, middle-aged son of Heaven, attired in a tussore silk suit of western cut that was decidedly too small for him. Was this more or less pig-like specimen not a victim to the singular view, that in proportion to one's financial well-being one had to put

on flesh? Bodily training would do wonders for the Chinaman, Anton thought; it would make him more manly and—it was a hard word but a true—less sensual, less of a glutton, the moment he could afford to do himself well.

The Arab had quite a different physique; often gaunt, but not seldom an admirable example of human mechanism and strength of nerve. To-day being Friday these high-grade Moslemin had closed their shops—at least in front; but many a quaint, tall, Shylock-like figure, in white turban and mantle, in bolero and sandals richly embroidered, emerged from a doorway, haughtiness breathing from the sharply-cut features, from the gait and mien. They inspired the childish native with a respect much stronger than that which he felt for the white ruler: respect, awe, and veneration for the leading men in the Mohammedan world, the race from which the Prophet himself had sprung! Some of them passed Anton, making for the Mosque in solemn strides; a silent, self-sufficient type of humanity, as defiant of others as they were indifferent to the suspicion they aroused themselves. Did not the Prophet say that the temporary masters, the usurpers, were dogs, infidels, and vermin? Their time would surely come—and a fine time it would be!

From a large Chinese house that Anton recognised at once—its finely carved, overhanging roof elaborately gilded and adorned with fantastic demons and flowers in enamel, standing out sharply against the hard blue sky—he remembered having seen the *Tjap Gome* feast, seven years ago. The Chinese owner, a wealthy, hospitable man, had invited *omnis Batavia* to come

and look on, and that night the spacious house had been crowded. Even the private apartments at the farther side of the inner court, where the practical master of the house shuts his women in and competition out, had, in a spirit of liberalism, been vacated by the fair inmates and thrown open to the hundreds of guests, for whom nothing seemed too good in the way of food and drink.

But the crowd in the street had been far greater. Closely jammed together between the hard, white houses, thousands of the poorer Europeans, Eurasians, Chinamen of the artisan class, and natives—mostly accompanied by their wives and children—surged like a sea ; now slowly moving, now motionless and staring in a body, as if all at the same time had made the arresting discovery that, as the show must in any case pass their way, it was better to await it quietly. Meanwhile the air was thick with noise and smoke. What is a Chinese feast without fireworks ? Through the starlit night, up went the rockets, slowly followed at a distance by paper balloons, inwardly aglow ; while between bare and shod feet burst hundreds of crackers, amid shrieks and yells, hurrahs and cat-calls. Clouds of *confetti* and miles of serpentine floated and curled around the stands in front of the houses, where the amateurish bands, in cheap and tawdry uniforms, performed cacophonies of their own invention, and where a more genteel set of spectators than those below, infected by the general excitement, suddenly became as mad as the rest and began to throw out money for the multitude to scramble for.

Anton imagined he could still hear the roar of

blunderbusses and the crack of pistols, the shrill whistles and wailing myrlitons of that festive night ; they had seemed sufficient to keep things going and people amused. Yet the real fun, as all knew, was still to come. Though packed like cardines in a tin, and though the street was hardly forty feet wide, the human throng showed a miraculous elasticity when, heralded by a flourish of trumpets and supported by kettle-drums and gongs, the marvel of the evening appeared : a procession of children gorgeously attired and fantastically made up, wee Chinese dolls fastened to grinning monsters or riding piebald horses quiet as lambs, while others were paraded in diminutive, lavishly-decorated sedan chairs, carried high above the heads of the audience that loudly manifested its approval. These infants—for they were little more—represented important mythological personages, and quite looked their parts ; it was only after hours of exposure that their powers of endurance gave way, and they hung like dead bodies at the stake.

To the European spectator this part of the show could only for a moment appeal, and Anton had been much better amused by the group of native, or half-caste, actors who followed and going from house to house parodied Harmston's, the well-known and favourite circus, with many a sly dig at the authorities and the ruling class in general. That had been a bit of real fun in the ocean of merely spectacular effects and scenic triumphs.

But there was a good deal of reality in the noise too, and—in the smells, by Jove !

The pandemonium had about reached its height,

when a terrible dragon, quite thirty yards long and "worked" by a dozen helpers, forced its way through the throng, striking terror into the hearts of big and small children, yet symbolising for them protection against the spirits of evil whom its leaps and bounds were intended to impress. Finally the monster went to pieces, owing to a vitality that proved too strong for its component parts, in their frantic efforts adequately to express an indomitable savagery.

To-day the scene was peaceful enough. It was no doubt the contrast with the present hour that made these old recollections so vivid. Still, even now the quarter had an exotic charm ; unassuming and isolated from the centre, it had preserved a touch of romance all its own.

Every now and then Anton peeped round the hood of the victoria to steal a glance at some mystery-laden interior, where, in the twilight, piles of merchandise were heaped in the narrow, oblong shop, suggesting unheard-of riches. At first the impression was of a huge collection of Eastern works of art, in silk, in leather, metal, or porcelain—of fantastic jewellery, of priceless vases and exquisite embroidery, of intoxicating perfumes and curios of all sorts, each with a history of its own. For a moment he was again caught by the old make-believe, the imperishable spell of the Orient, its highly romantic note that turns pebbles into precious stones and cotton into silk ; he even went so far as to ask himself if it would not be nice to stop and buy some presents for Annie, his temporarily forsaken sweetheart, and Pauline, who had found her for him ; on second thoughts, however, he mastered

the naïve impulse, natural enough in a man who had lived many years in the wilderness. There had not been much opportunity for shopping in Takalar, he mused with a smile, but realised in time that the world here was one of glitter and deception, trading on the legend of Eastern treasures, of gems the West could never produce, but only dream of ; for what was shown in these tiny, dusty windows was nothing but modern *bric-à-brac* from Bombay or Yokohama, or, worse still, Bremen or Nuremberg. He did not want to purchase *cloisonné* or bronzes or heathen gods or goddesses that had found their way to Batavia from Birmingham, via Singapore or Shanghai !

CHAPTER XXI

THE sun was sinking. In another hour the shadows, already stretching across the road, would have extinguished the last spark of life that the day had brought to the joyless streets and the ancient buildings of lower Batavia, to veil it for the night in merciful oblivion.

Most of the offices in the *Kali Besar* (Main River, along which the street so-called runs), the aorta of Batavian commerce, were on the point of closing. One by one the rickety vehicles that had stood as though petrified along the quay, in front of the long row of antiquated houses enlivened by a few door-plates and with lines of discoloured shutters, were awakened from the doze coachmen and horses had for hours indulged in, and lumbered away to train or tram in a violent hurry, mounting the steep narrow bridge across the lazy stream at a gallop that made their fare, always a pale, tired-looking man in white, grasp his sun-helmet and plant it more firmly on his head.

It was about five o'clock when Anton van Weghe left the premises of the Anglo-Australian Trading Company, an imposing two-storied structure on the western bank of the river, once the residence of no less a personage than Governor-General van Diemen

of Cape Town fame and the sponsor of Van Diemen's Land. Here he had seen van Loon, the managing director, thus concluding the various affairs that had called him to "the City." Though he felt as if he had been many times wet through and was only just beginning to get dry, he had made good use of his afternoon. All that now remained for him to do before the *Juliana* sailed was some shopping in Weltevreden, and a single formal visit to be paid. Those he would reserve for the next morning.

He could not well leave Java without reporting himself to the Director of the Interior, the head of his department; but this duty he had decided not to perform until the last moment, as otherwise the big man might ask him to dine, an honour that, if conferred, could not well be refused but which Anton was anything but keen on. The Director was a sworn foe of Governor Brand's, and his most formidable competitor for a seat on the Council of Netherlands-India. Anton did not wish to be "pumped." Besides, he strongly disliked the man himself, being aware of various things that signalled him as an intriguer and a humbug of the typical, bureaucratic variety.

The visit to van Loon, to which he had looked forward with a certain eagerness, was, while it had not led to the result anticipated, on the other hand made memorable by a surprise of the first magnitude that kept him in a state of nervous excitement long after he left the office, and for a while put the dramatic occurrence of the morning entirely out of his head.

Two years previously, while passing through Macassar, on a business trip to North Celebes, where

important mining interests were under his firm's control, van Loon had made Anton's acquaintance at a dinner party at Government House. Mutually attracted, they had met again; and, before the merchant resumed his journey to the North, he accepted the Civil Service man's invitation to come and stay with him in Takalar, on his way home. So, one fine morning, Anton met him in Galesong, half-way between Takalar and Macassar, whence, having transferred himself to his host's buggy from the car that had brought him thither, the guest was driven along the new road—which to a large extent was Anton's work—to the *Contrôleur's* house that at once shook off its lonely air on the appearance of a fellow-European of culture and winning personality. The three days spent together were a great success. How quickly they had passed and what pleasant recollections they had left behind them! Even now Anton had only to shut his eyes to see himself and his guest stretched out in wicker chairs, enjoying a good cigar after a well-deserved dinner and a day spent on one or other lengthy excursion in the neighbourhood, making van Loon, unaccustomed as he was to much physical exertion, ask his cicerone if he never felt tired.

How they had talked!—in their isolation from a world that, like a huge spectacle seen from a distance and staged expressly for them, rose before their imagination, against the peaceful background of a tropical night. Now they discussed Holland and its potentialities for the future, or reviewed the good times it had given them in the past; then the marvels of London—unknown to Anton, but where van Loon, after the

completion of his studies at the commercial college of Amsterdam, had worked, first in a bank in Threadneedle Street and later with a firm in Mincing Lane, and in the course of five years had, as he put it, "been quite won over to the way *they* do things!" It was here of course that he had acquired that English *cachet* and the perfect mastery of the language which he easily convinced Anton were indispensable, if you wanted to persuade the true Briton that you were any good at all.

In their conversations they had also discussed at considerable length the future of Takalar and the adjoining kingdom of Goa, just annexed and brought—officially at least—under direct Dutch rule. There, in a few years, European capital would have a splendid chance of acquiring concessions of great promise. Rumours of gold having been found in a number of streams in the as yet not even mapped-out region north of the Lompobatang; of the probable existence of coal beneath the undulating offshoots to the West of that colossus; of the existence of oil here and manganite there, had been for some time rife and had caused a flutter in Batavia's Wall Street, the *Kali Besar* (Main River). Van Loon had shown himself particularly anxious to know how far these vague reports could be substantiated; but here Anton had been unable to help him. As everything was in a state of transition and the parts involved were as yet inaccessible, it would take a long time before trustworthy, expert information was forthcoming, he explained.

When they parted, however, at van Loon's special request he promised to do his best to provide him with all information he would be able to collect.

In the course of a year the sum total of his investigations and conclusions, originally intended for a small essay, had swollen to a volume of respectable dimensions. When it seemed that he could add no more, he sent a copy, written in the copper-plate of which the native clerk is a past master, to van Loon. "Look through it, if you will," his accompanying note ran, "and tell me what you think of it."

He waited—but van Loon seemed in no hurry to answer. He acknowledged the receipt of the bulky manuscript, expressing his admiration for the labour involved and promising to give his opinion as soon as he could find the time to read it.

That was all! For two or three months not another word, till Anton's excitement considerably cooled down and a reaction set in, however much he might try to take it as a matter of course that a man so busy, so involved in all kinds of old and new undertakings as van Loon, should have little leisure for special studies.

At last there came signs of life. Van Loon wrote that he was on the point of taking a much-needed holiday in the Preanger, and that part of the time should be given to the reading of Anton's *book*, as he called it. Then, for some weeks, silence again, and when news at last came that the manuscript had been digested, van Loon only said in general terms that he was much impressed by the interesting details, and: "We want a lengthy yarn like we had in Takalar, to discuss your various conclusions."

To-day the interview had taken place. In his private room at the end of the long passage, from which rows of cubicles, crowded with clerks, were only separated

by low teak partitions, van Loon had received him with a cordiality and an alacrity that at once dispelled Anton's intention of being a little stand-off and dignified, just to show he was not to be treated as a casual acquaintance, still less as one come to beg a favour. But looking van Loon in the face and holding his hand, there was the old sensation again : friendship at first sight. What did the rest matter ?

The exuberance of reciprocal delight at meeting over, both sat down, and van Loon, unlocking a drawer in his writing-table, took out the bulky manuscript Anton knew so well, placed it in front of him, and began :

" This is an admirable piece of work, van Weghe. My best congratulations, and thank you again for letting me have it. For several reasons I did not send it back ; among others, I wanted MacIllfrith's opinion—he is one of our directors. He is very interested and anxious to meet you, but is unfortunately away. He is much impressed by the information you have collected ; it is a splendid introduction to a better acquaintance with those parts of the colony of which—you are right—we know far too little. He quite agrees as to its possible value to ourselves—but to me personally it is the *raw* material, so to say, that appeals, and there my sympathy ends. Your standpoint is exactly what it was two years ago—you insist on a big, all-embracing plan and in that I cannot follow you. The moment you begin to draw conclusions, you look at things—don't mind my saying so—through your official spectacles—time and money, in business all-important, don't count with you at all. You ask, not what practical results can be obtained in the shortest possible

period, but how the whole land—as big as Holland, mind!—can be made prosperous. Now such a scheme is Utopian, there is no other word for it—it simply can't be carried out. You think in big figures, you generalise—we must *specialise* on the contrary.

“ You have set yourself to concoct a system on which, in theory, developments may safely rest. But, my dear man, where are your foundations? They have always to be dug; empire building is no exception to the rule, believe me! To you nothing seems more logical than that your means of communication, your labour and irrigation once there, the rest will follow. I am not so sure of it. We are not in the United States or Canada, with thousands ready to occupy newly opened-up territories; we are in India, my friend, where settlers of the kind required are not so easily procured. All the things that you are counting on, railways and so forth, will only come in the wake of those who have given the best of their capacity and strength to obtain results with small means. Don't interrupt me!—I know what you would say. But, my dear chap, look round you! How did Deli start its present magnificent tobacco industry? And the Lampongs? And the coffee and tea and sugar in the heart of Java? By building railways? By marching on to the field with legions of trained labour? No, by struggling through years of need and difficulty, and showing in the end that, notwithstanding drawbacks and disappointments, the land could afford such luxuries as railroads and make them pay a handsome dividend. If the Government will play the good fairy and guarantee a decent interest for a certain number

of years on the capital employed, that's another thing—the line might be built. But even then I should not like to risk much in the venture."

He paused for a moment, then went on :

"All the same, your book is a storehouse of information that would interest any business man—it is the use you want us to put it to that is wrong. But nothing is easier than to push your scheme of development aside and look only at the facts you give us—we can handle them in our own way. There is material for a dozen small monographies that would interest many different people. Turn them into prospectuses—that would amply repay you for the enormous trouble you have taken ! This about mining in Binamoe, for instance, is so good that you could easily form a syndicate—or we would do it for you—so as to be ready the moment the Government agrees to grant concessions. There is money in it. You might make a small fortune ! "

"You forget that I did it all——"

"Disinterestedly ? "

"Precisely."

"Disinterested people are no good in business. Interest, self-interest, is what we want, and the desire to get rich."

"I don't care to go in for company-floating," Anton said with something like scorn. Van Loon's slashing attack on his beloved scheme caused him the keenest disappointment, and he could not help feeling just a little superior to a man with whom money came always first.

"How can you get along without them ? Unless,

as I said, the Government makes us a present of everything. Even your railway has to be built by *some one*!" van Loon remarked drily.

"I am sorry I cannot make you see things as I do," sighed Anton, greedily drinking the glass of ice-water an *oppas* offered him. "It does look silly to have taken so much pains, and all for nothing."

"For nothing? Not a bit of it! If you would only give up the, what I call, pompous part of your plan and turn all your attention to the *practical* side of the question—I wonder," he suddenly interrupted himself, "have you ever thought of leaving the Government Service?"

He spoke quite casually, playing with his eye-glasses; but his brows contracted a little, and a somewhat nervous movement round his mouth betrayed a greater interest than he was willing to allow.

Anton was genuinely startled by the suggestion. "I! Leave the public service? What has put such a thing into your head? I am quite satisfied where I am. There *was* a time—but *now*! I am just beginning to feel at home in the purple," he added laughingly.

"I see. It is only natural, after all. You have been successful, and the authorities have been good enough to recognise your merits. That's where the danger lies."

"What a curious way of putting it!" Anton exclaimed.

"It is the only word—for the higher you climb the official ladder the more you will lose sight of realities. You already feel at home in the purple? The day

will come that you cannot live without it, which to my mind will be a great pity ! A good business man will have been lost in you, and, on the other hand, I cannot see *you* cut a very enviable figure in the midst of ambitious, embittered, and intriguing bureaucrats. Besides, think of the relatively poor salary you get, while, if you were free to act for yourself on the lines you have instinctively followed in this book of yours, you might become a wealthy man, able to do exactly what you liked ! ”

Anton sat erect in his chair. “ And a moment ago you said I was so impractical,” he protested somewhat faintly, the alluring words still ringing in his ears.

“ That I never did, or if so, I am quite ready to take it back. It was *the official* I attacked, the man who looks upon himself as born to the job and upon the job itself as a kind of heavenly mission, to bestow blessings on the crowd, with no responsibility except to those above him. Your late chief, Governor Brand, is not of that type, but, by Jove, he is a *rara avis* amongst the gold-capped chosen ones—chosen, that is, by themselves. Do you know what strikes me as very funny ? That the last time he was over here, he mentioned *you* to me as an example of how people with a strong dislike to school *régime* and a strong appetite for the good things of life turn out splendidly, once they have found their way through the thicket for themselves ! ”

“ Did he say that ? ” Anton involuntarily exclaimed, blushing like a girl at the flattering information. Then he added : “ The old chap no doubt meant that I had at last found my vocation—and here you sit trying to

persuade me that I am on the wrong tack and it is not my job at all ? ”

“ Oh, you fill the position well enough, better than many another—but that does not mean it is the thing you would do best. What I am trying to convince you is that there is a larger field open to you than that of mere theoretical achievements. A man like you should not lose himself in beautiful visions, but give them life and form, that is where I should like to help you—at the same time,” he added with a laugh, “ serving my own ends ! Let me speak without reserve. Suppose I were to say to you : I have studied this report, or whatever you call it, minutely, not for its literary or argumentative value but with an eye to what it can do for us, business men. And our final conclusion, MacIllfrith’s as well as mine, is that we ought to interest ourselves in its propositions, but—in our own fashion. Suppose, further, that we want a man on the spot, in Macassar say, to go backwards and forwards into the country, with a trained personnel to do the office work. To speak plainly : we wish to open a branch, on a small scale to begin with, of our firm in Macassar, to deal exclusively with South Celebes. Now—the last of my suppositions—what would you say if we asked *you* to be the man in charge ? ”

“ You take me entirely by surprise ! ” was all Anton could manage to reply.

“ That is so, but what does it matter ? It is a thing I could not well write about. Besides, it is only a suggestion. I do not in the least expect you to decide at once. You have your own interests to consider. Think it over. We are in no hurry, but

within six months should like to have your answer. That is, if there is a possibility of your accepting ; if not, tell us so at once and we won't speak of it again."

There was silence, except for vague, distant sounds of desks being shut and doors banged to. The staff was evidently leaving.

"Think it calmly over," van Loon went on. "We would give you a thousand guilders a month as a start and make a contract with you for three years, at the end of which, should you not wish to go on, or we think it better to give it up, we would pay you ten thousand guilders cash as compensation for your having resigned your present berth. One thing, however, you must keep in mind—this is only the minimum of what you may expect. If we were not convinced that you are the very man we want we should never make you such an offer, and if we are successful you will profit largely, I promise you. But the details can be settled later. Your travelling expenses will be paid, of course, and you will get a commission on all profits. I have drawn up a rough scheme for the contract."

Taking a sheet of paper from his desk he handed it to Anton, who, glancing at it without seeing it, did not know what to say. He felt pleased and tempted ; but to give up his present position, to descend from the safe and lofty heights of official authority to mix with the crowd below, would mean a complete change in his circumstances. Money was not everything—but if Fate was not too unkind, to have it in his power to make the wilderness blossom and explore the land in all directions, while the scope of his activities slowly but surely expanded . . .

"I feel quite bewildered," he said at last, turning his sun-helmet round and round between his hands and looking at it as if it could bring him some solution. "But it is worth considering. I am very, very thankful for your offer. I will think it over."

"Bravo!" said van Loon. "Do; consider quietly, and let us have your decision as soon as you can. You shall have our official letter to-morrow before you sail. I shall bring it you myself, for I want to see you off."

There the interview ended. Anton, walking away from the office with the vague intention of taking the tram at the corner of Java Street, caught himself calculating how much, out of a thousand guilders a month, he would be able to save. And that, van Loon had said, was the *minimum* !

CHAPTER XXII

HOURS ago Anton had dismissed his carriage, and now—van Loon being evidently under the impression that he had one, or he would have offered to lend his own—found himself somewhat in the same predicament as at noon, when, hurrying away from the Delmaars', he intended to drive to the tram, but could find no vehicle to take him. What ages seemed to have gone by since that interview with Marie !

Emerging from the protecting shade of the houses along the river, whose turbid waters soon shrank to a mere ditch encircling the knoll on the left that was once a formidable bastion and, as the Dutch bard put it, "a jewel in the golden girdle of the Queen of the East"—Batavia, Anton climbed a high, narrow bridge, only a little less quaint and steep than those he had known intimately in Amsterdam and had glanced at in Venice. Here, across an open square, a last sheaf of sunrays attacked him in the flank ; but hardly had he descended on the other side than he again found himself in a bower of caressing shadow. A few steps along a dusty, uneven footway, through a passage between nondescript buildings and irregular, white-washed walls, and the street, widening considerably,

led him into the midst of a bustling crowd, exclusively Asiatic in movement and pose, in line and colour.

A row of houses, totally different in size and appearance from those on the quay, stood on his right—all shops below and all long roofs above; roofs that, in the Chinese fashion, were overtopped by the quaintly decorated side-walls, making the staring gables look like old men with their heads sunk on their breasts between the bony shoulders. They had something weird and exotic about them, but seemed good-natured enough. In the wide curve in which they stood, leaning hard against each other, they appeared keenly interested in the throng seething at their feet; but notwithstanding this apparent concern for the passing hour, there was a note of absent-mindedness about them, as though they were secretly laughing to themselves. "What are these ancients thinking of?" Anton wondered. "Of the endless stocks of merchandise sold for ages beneath their tottering roofs? Or of the countless fools deceived and cheated by the generations that have lived within the shelter of their discoloured walls?"

On his left, in a narrower compass of the half-circle, the ditch now reappeared; once, two centuries ago, a zone of danger for those trying to climb the wall at night, after the gates were closed. Now no watchful musketeer shouted his "Who goes there?" Still the narrow stretch of water was impassable; for, opposite, straight out of the greenish mystery below, rose another row of houses, embracing and as it were absorbing what was left of the former rampart and deliberately turning their backs on the street Anton

was following—from which the sluggish stream divided them. Though low, and by no means imposing, they looked haughty and reserved, and contained no shops—at least on that side—as they could only be approached by means of a waterway too narrow for barges to pass along. Their flat, melancholy faces had for eyes a few—mostly shut—windows, and expressed anxiety to keep severely apart from the vulgar crowd beyond. “What odd, disfigured creatures,” Anton mused, “and yet how beautiful!” It was as if their worn-out bodies had relinquished the struggle for existence; the ivory features were heavy with sleep—or was it death? As though in playful irony, their ridges, tinged by the last rays of the setting sun, were ablaze with burning gold, while lower down, along the pale sides, all was wrapped in semi-darkness. What a contrast between brilliant light and gloom, between the stifling atmosphere outside and the coolness of the scarcely revealed interiors!

Anton's eyes hung with tenderness on the naïve adornments of the upper stories, where pale grey masonry, sprinkled with withered gilding, struck a delightful note against the eternal blue of the sky. His gaze wandered down over the parts in shadow: what a delicacy of tint, what tender shades, what an almost human expression on the stony countenances! The shutters, where not wanting, were of a washed-out green or faded blue he had never seen elsewhere. Since the paint was first smeared on this woodwork, how many years had come and gone, how many centuries must have elapsed before the sun and rain had transformed the erstwhile strong colours into these

quivering hues? When were the time-worn structures piled together, stone by stone? Whose the hands that moulded the crumbling cornices or carved the quaint balcony beneath that window? The East lives quickly and soon forgets; but here, at least to those able to catch it and understand, a clear echo from a remote past was audible. Sometimes, the more resolutely lips are closed, the more they have to tell. Death and decay had for ages attacked these walls—yet there they stood, drained of their blood, but still alive. Would they ever stop dreaming of joy outlived and overwhelming sorrow? They seemed resigned to their fate, accepting the inevitable, from whose "Get on!" there is neither escape nor appeal.

And Anton asked himself what endless stream of mortals these ancient dwellings, seemingly absorbed in their own reflection in the stagnant water, must have witnessed, to be so tired of those existing *now*; what noise and excitement the miniature bridge—a tiny arch over a tiny stream—had surely experienced, to stand thus quietly indifferent to the rumour of the *living* throng.

In a single, all-embracing vision, he fancied he beheld all the various manifestations of humanity surging round here in the Past, emanating from an ever active, ever bargaining race, as keen in its business instincts as it is faithful to its own law and customs—till he roused himself from his musings with the thought: Does for me the Present not suffice?

Three-quarters of an hour later, and Anton, after a

tram ride that left him with a stronger desire than ever for a bath and a change, a cup of tea and a talk with van Eelde under the trees in front of his pavilion, reached his temporary quarters on the King's Plain again.

Alighting from the *dos-d-dos* he had clambered into at the Harmonie, he hurried along the straight, long path between the squares of lawn, marvelling that it should be only twenty-four hours since the first time he had followed it. Much had occurred in the interval ; but, taking it all round, he felt he had no reason to complain.

On the grass to his right, a few hundred yards away, sat, or rather lay van Eelde smoking and reading, stretched out in a wicker chair of unusually large proportions, flat and wide, like a punt floating on a green sea. At the far side of the small tea-table at his elbow stood a similar but empty chair, evidently awaiting Anton.

Looking up from his paper, van Eelde, seeing him approach, expressed his pleasure by a shout and a wave of the hand.

" Ready for tea ? " he queried, as soon as the guest was within earshot.

" Rather ! " came the prompt reply, though Anton added : " Just let me throw off my things ; I must have a bath—I *must* ! "

" Have that later on, when it is dark. Now only make yourself comfortable, and double sharp. I've been waiting for you long enough."

" All right ; I'm coming ! Half a sec.," Anton called back gaily.

With the pleasant feeling of being home again, a real harbour of rest, away from the dust and the heat of the streets, in congenial surroundings, he reached his room. Hardly had he pulled off his clothes and donned his pyjamas, than there was a knock at the door. "*Surat* telegram, *Kandjeng*!"* said Kromo's voice from the outside. Beekveldt's reply, of course. He had forgotten all about it. In the excitement of his interview with van Loon, his craving for the promised letter from Annie had receded to the background. Now it revived in full force.

"Letter left Macassar Monday by direct boat *slamat*,"† ran the message. That was good news. And Anton, falling into a chair, calculated how, on the Wednesday afternoon, the epistle would have reached Surabaya, and on the following morning—yesterday—have left for Batavia. It would be here this same evening, and delivered by the eight o'clock post. In his gratitude he sent off two imaginary wires at once: one to his sweetheart in Holland, the writer of the missive, and another to good old Beekveldt who had forwarded it in time.

"That's all right," he murmured, rising and entering the study. Here a post-card, with his name on it, caught his eye. From Jeannette! Beyond the address it contained nothing but one huge point of interrogation. He understood—she was eager to hear if he had seen Marie and, if so, what had happened! He smiled. "And women accuse us men of being curious! Patience, my dear—all in good time!" he said aloud. But what a careless thing for her to do!—until he

* "A telegram, your Lordship."

† "Good luck!"

noticed "care of Daendels," so that its being delivered here was in consequence of his own call and request. Still, van Eelde must have seen it, and would be sure to interpret the large *P* as referring to himself. With a start Anton realised that the enigmatic sign must have left his friend under the impression that Jeannette was inquiring as to the present state of *his* feelings—that the brother and sister had discussed them, and that he, Anton, had promised faithfully to report what he could discover.

The recollection of the good news he had to give her soon dispelled the unpleasant notion. The partly dreaded, partly desired interview had taken place, with the result that it was now proved beyond all doubt that his love for Marie *was* dead, "dead as a door-nail." He did not want her and—she did not want him. Could anything be more satisfactory? He did not wish her to be still in love with him—now, did he? No, of course! Thus a most emphatic *finis* had been put to that chapter in both their lives. Looking back it seemed incredible that he had ever played a rôle—a leading rôle—in the story that was now relegated to its proper place in his experience, as an episode, an adventure, nothing more.

How Jeannette, with her great sisterly interest, would rejoice in this solution; the more so as it was *she* who had advocated fearless measures, had advised him not to avoid but boldly to face Marie and find out for himself whether she could influence him still. He would, of course, never confess the extent to which the experiment had been carried; but it was the least he could do to inform his sister of the successful

issue of the policy she had so strenuously put forward.

So he seated himself at the writing-table, and taking a card from a box labelled *briefkaarten*, scribbled a few words, significant enough to the initiated, but affording no clue to the outside reader. In order to blot what he had written, he opened the pad that lay on his left.

The leaves parted automatically where a thick object was placed between them: a photo, lying face downwards. The thought flashed into his mind at once that it must be the one he had seen van Eelde slip in here, after kissing it, the night before.

He was immediately filled with the irresistible desire to turn it round and satisfy himself that it was his sister's. But a feeling of decency stayed his hand—he had no right to spy at what was so obviously hidden. He stared at the glazed back, bearing in elegant lettering the name and address of the photographer, till suddenly his eye was arrested by the word *Bruxelles*! How could Jeannette, who as far as he knew had never been photographed outside The Hague, how could she—He seized the piece of cardboard and turned it over, to find himself confronted with Marie Delmaar's image!

The blow was overwhelming. He had risen to his feet, and now felt himself swaying slightly. As a matter of fact he did not move or even tremble, but stood petrified, unable to think or act. How long this state of insensibility lasted he never knew; all he ever recollected was the state in which he found himself when, awaking from his torpor, he positively asseverated that this could not be true.

"It is too absurd!" he automatically said. It was one of van Eelde's silly jokes—he carried them too far.

Yet no! Slowly but surely he felt compelled to contemplate the new turn affairs had taken, and to face a world entirely different from what it had seemed a while ago. It had undergone a sudden change, as though struck by lightning that left it shrunk and charred—one touch and it would crumble to dust and ashes. Anton contemplated it in awe, not daring to lift a finger; prepared to leave it as it was, "drained of its blood though still alive," like the houses in the Chinese *kamp* he had been watching only an hour before.

But life, the necessity of living, pushed him on; it was in vain that he implored the invisible forces of his destiny to let him leave the thing alone and draw no conclusions from his discovery. No attempt at concealment could avail him. It was Marie who looked at him, Marie, in evening-dress, her throat still full and young and lovely as he had once known it—suddenly grown repulsive while he realised how little feeling for him had ever lain below that satin skin.

He dropped the portrait as though it burnt his hand. What was Marie to him now? But immediately on the heels of this question came another: What was she to van Eelde? What was this woman to his friend?

A call reached him from the garden: "Tony! Tony!"

Tony, indeed! he moaned to himself, in utmost

bitterness and pain. But, however awful, the situation must be faced. Without knowing what to do, he replaced the photo in the pad, and mechanically, like a man walking in his sleep, strode out to his host on the lawn.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE two long chairs made a cream-coloured patch on the closely-cut grass, but their outlines were already becoming less distinct, as the light waned and a nebulous matter, colourless and damp, began to gather about their straight feet. In another quarter of an hour it would be difficult to see from the house if they were still there, or if Kromo, van Eelde's boy, had already removed them.

Their broad wicker backs were turned to the pavilion, and this was to Anton a great relief: as he advanced his friend could not well look round without raising himself up, and so disturbing the delicious repose he was indulging in. While still enjoying his *far niente*, stretched out at full length as if all idea of work and worry were for ever banished, van Eelde seemed in the best of spirits.

"Well," came his deep bass, in jovial tones, as he heard Anton's step behind him, "what have you been doing all day long? I began to think you were never coming back, and was just asking myself what I had done to be thus deserted, when I saw you drop from your *dos-à-dos* at the gate. That was a relief, I can tell you."

"You hypocrite!" Anton said to himself, though next moment he recognised the injustice of the qualification. Van Eelde was, of course, quite unconscious of giving any pain, and was not under the slightest obligation to keep him, Anton, informed as to his love affairs.

At a loss what to say, Anton did not at once reply. He was afraid of his voice betraying him; and should van Eelde, noticing his emotion, ask him the reason—what then? He was by no means prepared to demand an explanation of his discovery; besides, how could that be done except at the risk of a violent scene and a final breach in their relations? It was over a love affair that they had quarrelled before; he was not going to have the same thing over again if he could help it. *Then*, Jeannette being his sister, he had a certain right to interfere—*now* he had none whatever. For what, after all, was Marie to him, and—as he knew by experience—what could she give another? So why be jealous? Van Eelde might have her and welcome! Here, however, Anton's philosophy forsook him.

Absurd as it would doubtless be to bandy words about a woman who had no further claim on him, in whose life he no longer counted, the feeling was there that to him Fate had been most unkind, while on these two she seemed to smile, and—at *his* expense.

Why—he asked himself in growing revolt—should he have to lose his old love and his best friend at one stroke? What had he done to deserve this blow, he who had already decided to give Marie up?

It was beastly unfair. And that was not all. For there was of course a connection—into which the

spirit urged him to inquire—between Marie's severity towards himself and the evidently intimate footing she was on with van Eelde, the man whom an unkind destiny had converted from a beloved chum into a formidable and hateful rival. That Marie should have formed her hard judgment of himself years ago, and of her own accord, he refused to believe. It had come to her as an afterthought, quite recently ; she had been led by some extraneous influence. A new love had made her unjust to the old one ; another man had rendered her harsh and cruel to himself, who had gone into exile in order to save her !

This latest addition to her many triumphs was van Eelde. It seemed incredible, yet was there any escape from the dread conclusion ?

Why, oh why was he not allowed to leave the East in peace, without having *this* to face in his final moments ? Had he heard of it later, altered circumstances would have made him indifferent to whatever Marie might choose to do. A single day, a few hours, and the wide waves of the ocean would have borne him out of reach of sufferings that seemed unmerited, as he had settled his account with the Past and voluntarily admitted the folly and wickedness of his former passion. A few weeks, and the sea-breeze would have blown away all that remained of it, cooling his head, now hot with the afterglow of a fire that he had honestly tried to stamp out.

Quick as lightning his thoughts took another direction. There was no time for self-pity—he must prepare to act. He must see where he stood and decide what to do. First he had to trace what was at the

back of a relationship that only the merest chance had revealed—to find out what Marie was to this man and what this man was to her. He would have no rest before he knew the truth, however humiliating to himself that truth might be. But—how discover it? The secret had been scrupulously kept. Neither of the two had given him the slightest cause for suspicion; how unlikely that van Eelde should now be frank with him! He could not mention that morning's interview, nor could he ask van Eelde straight out, how Marie's portrait came to be in his possession. However accidental the find, he would at once be suspected of prying, or how could he have detected the photograph inside that blotting-pad?

No, he must leave it to chance to afford him an opening. He must be careful not to make himself ridiculous. Of course there was just the possibility that van Eelde had got hold of the portrait without Marie's knowledge, or that she had given it him out of friendship, pure and simple. On the other hand, the idea of her fostering a platonic feeling for any man seemed utterly absurd. She would either remain indifferent or would have no rest until she had brought him to his knees!

Had this awful doubt not come between, how he would have welcomed an intimate chat with van Eelde about his own future, telling him of van Loon's magnificent offer, and then, in connection with it, of his matrimonial plans.

All this was now impossible. He could accept neither congratulations nor advice from a man who was no longer his friend; it was hard enough to repress the overpowering impulse to call him a hypocrite to his

face. In vain Anton's better feelings proclaimed van Eelde innocent of anything that rendered him unworthy of friendship. In his subconsciousness, jealousy and spite had the upper hand, and persisted in declaring that the other had forfeited all right to his regard. As they sat, Anton scanned him with a cold, critical eye, and found that he even seemed to have undergone an outward change, to have lost some of his personal attractions.

Meanwhile the object of his criticism was amusing himself—and for all he knew his audience—by giving a running commentary on the numerous items of interest of the day, contained in the paper he was reading. Selecting them at random, he allowed himself that free version of the various topics, for which he was applauded or hated by his acquaintances.

To-day, for the first time, Anton failed to break into a hearty laugh at the clever sallies or to appreciate van Eelde's ready wit. He was forced to endeavour to look amused, as otherwise he would have at once been asked what was the matter; but the necessity of hiding his true feelings was extremely painful, reminding him of that moment on the *Boni*, when his old antagonist Blok stood speechifying till he was more than sick of it.

Never before had it struck him how poor van Eelde's witticisms really were, when closely examined; his attacks on the leading officials of the hour lacked novelty as well as justice. How stupid to judge these mediocrities by an ideal standard! "Is *he* such a paragon of usefulness himself? Does *he* deserve every guilder of the salary he gets?" Anton wondered

bitterly. "Does *he* never make mistakes; are *his* motives always of the purest?" Then, thinking of Marie, "How easily some women are caught by what is, after all, nothing but clever talk and paradoxes *à la* Shaw!" he concluded his silent philippic, returning to the man in front of him with a "Will he never turn the searchlight on his beloved Self?"

The moment a pause came in van Eelde's verbosity, Anton made up his mind to speak.

"What about tea?" he said. "While you sit talking I am parched with thirst!"

"My dear fellow, I beg your pardon! But why didn't you call out?" and the host, raising himself on his elbow, seized the pot, and in a half-sitting, half-recumbent attitude filled a cup.

"Kromo!" he shouted, falling back in his long chair. Like an arrow from the bow, the "boy," squatting in the distance, shot to the table, and taking the cup and saucer respectfully offered them to the *Kandjeng Tuan Controleur*, who, at only a couple of feet distance from the officiator, received them with a smile, amused in spite of himself at the hyper-indolent, typically oriental way in which van Eelde acquitted himself of the trivial function. The little incident helped to overcome Anton's dread of betraying his state of mind. It would be a relief to turn his attention to matters less serious and painful than those with which he was preoccupied.

"Down town it was like a furnace," he remarked between two cautious sips.

"Was it? I don't wonder. It is still hot," van Eelde answered. "Much hotter than yesterday.

The monsoon is not yet over. It looks like thunder. Do you see *that*?" and he pointed to the horizon, where a huge pale bank of clouds seemed all at once to have sprung into existence.

For some time both men were silent, van Eelde having sunk into one of those reveries that not unfrequently interrupted his flow of talk. Suddenly he roused himself.

"I have something to tell you, Tony."

Startled by this announcement, Anton held his breath, making no reply. None, however, was expected of him.

"Yes," the speaker went on. "You will be surprised. But you must promise to keep it to yourself. As you are leaving to-morrow——"

He did not complete the sentence, but cast a glance in Anton's direction that, situated as they were, failed to reach him; but the intention was clear enough.

"I am listening," Anton said, his heart beating violently, for he had a vague presentiment of what was coming.

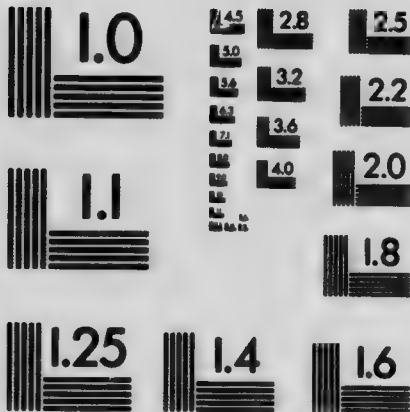
"You remember our talk, about this time yesterday? You asked me why I did not remarry. The question was natural enough, but I was not yet prepared to part with my secret. Now I have made up my mind. Well, my dear boy, if nothing comes between, in another year, say, I hope this lonely life will cease. I have again fallen a victim to the old illusion that *this* woman and only *she*—etcetera, etcetera. I have decided to give Fate another chance, *voilà!*"

He stopped. Then, turning his head, he succeeded



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in catching Anton's eye, as the latter had changed his position and was leaning forward. In flat contradiction to the lightness of his tone, van Eelde's glance was eager, as though he were anxious to see how his information was received. Anton, however, had himself well in hand, and, protected by the falling darkness, he quite adequately succeeded in playing the rôle of sympathetic listener imposed on him.

Again he abstained from making any reply, and again van Eelde did not seem to require one. At least he went on :

" Last night I had a great mind to unbosom myself, but you insisted on hearing about the novel. By the way, don't you go and let yourself believe that the plot of my book has any bearing on this other business. It was written long before she renewed my faith in marriage. But the turn our conversation took made it impossible to introduce her name—the risk was too great of making a wrong impression.

" Before saying who she is, I should like you to bear in mind that the circumstances of the case are most unusual, and require a great deal of careful consideration and tact in the handling. She is a married woman, on the point of divorcing her husband, with whom she is as a matter of course wretchedly unhappy. Does that give you any inkling ? "

" Not the slightest ! " Anton automatically said, adding to himself, by way of soothing his keen resentment : " It is no use kicking. After all, what is she to me ? Let him have her ! *Habis per a !* " *

* " That's the end of it ! " a Malay expression often used by Europeans.

"I mentioned her to you yesterday, on our way from the station."

"Yesterday? On our way from the station?" Anton repeated, as if searching his brains to remember.

"It is Mrs. Delmaar," van Eelde said, and got no further.

"Well, well!" Anton exclaimed, in feigned surprise.

"You know how miserable she is with Delmaar?" with a glance in Anton's direction that was lost in space.

"Of course. It was an open secret long ago," Anton remarked, leaning back in his chair.

"She has borne it like an angel, but there is a limit."

"Quite so," Anton mechanically agreed.

"I am sure we shall be very happy. We have both to make up for lost time, you see," van Eelde explained, with a nervous little laugh.

"Right! I suppose she looks upon you as her deliverer!"

"I hope so."

"You don't mean you are not yet finally accepted?"

"You understand, in the delicate position she is in— But I may as well make a clean breast of it: she has promised me to give me her definite answer this evening."

It took a little time for Anton to bring out:

"A mere formality, I suppose?"

"To tell you the truth, that is what I think myself."

A pause. Then van Eelde, with a quiver in his voice—at least so it seemed to Anton—asked:

" You knew her well at one time, didn't you ? "

" H'm, yes," Anton prudently admitted. This turning of the tables, however, found him wholly unprepared.

" So at least she told me, when I said you were coming," van Eelde slowly observed.

" What a blessing that I did not deny the fact ! " Anton thought.

" I told you so myself, yesterday," he said aloud.

" So you did. And—you liked her very much, I suppose ? "

Anton, afraid that Marie might have informed van Eelde of this too, had no choice but to admit it.

" You like her still ? "

" Of course. She is a most charming little person, isn't she ? "

" How non-committal ! " was van Eelde's comment, and a short silence followed the last words hanging in the air as if they had some special significance.

The lamps were being lit all down the road, points of hard, white light, springing up at intervals, as if by magic, one after the other, against a sky that was all mother-of-pearl. They contrasted strongly with the immense plain on the other side that had gradually shrunk till it became a long dark line, broad and resolute, and solid though indistinct at either end, where the bordering trees formed a somewhat confused, irregular trimming. The waringin tree in the foreground, to their right, had grown to an enormous, awe-inspiring mass, high and compact like a mountain, obscuring the broad drive now only traceable at the

gate, where the last faint glow of day seemed to hover before departing.

"Are you not going to call on her before you sail?" van Eelde's voice roused Anton from a world of sad reflections.

"What the dickens is he driving at?" he said to himself, before he could find the reply: "I don't see why I should."

"And you were such great friends!"

"So we *were*—five years ago. Did she tell you she expected me?" he added, with what seemed a lucky inspiration.

"No, but that says nothing. Given the terms you were evidently on, it is only natural that you should do so."

"I suppose you don't wish me to disturb your *tête-à-tête* to-night?"

"Dear me, no! But you have all to-morrow morning."

Anton began to feel uneasy. He cursed the other for his stupid persistence.

"I shouldn't think of such a thing. I don't want to see her any more," he said, losing his patience and speaking more forcibly than was advisable.

Van Eelde made no direct reply, but assumed a rigid sitting attitude in place of the indolent one in which he had been indulging. He seemed swayed by an inward struggle that had to be mastered before he could venture upon another word: as if, while realising the indelicacy of pressing the point any farther, a feeling stronger than himself urged him to discover why Anton should thus emphatically refuse to approach

Marie again, at the same time avoiding a frank explanation.

Bethinking himself that he must resort to better means than losing his temper if he wished to allay van Eelde's apparently aroused suspicions, Anton attempted to change the subject, but the expedient was rather poor.

"Give me another cup of tea, will you?" he said, in the most natural tone he was able to assume, and consequently not natural at all. "But a little weaker than the other, please. This Java tea, when it is made so strong——"

"Help yourself, if you don't mind," and van Eelde, getting up, turned the tray in Anton's direction; then walked away, but after a few steps returned and, sinking down on the edge of his chair, said in low, agitated tones:

"Look here—by playing hide and seek like this we shall get no further. And yet—I *must* know where I am. I should have liked to keep the beastly thing to myself and to ignore it, but it is stronger than I. *You* must help me to get rid of it!"

Anton put the tea-pot down and waited with bent head. He was evidently in for another nerve-stirring disclosure; but it might give him the key to the speaker's clearly shown determination to probe just those matters that he, Anton, was resolved to keep from him.

"To-day, at lunch, some one—no matter who it was—made a remark that ever since has weighed on my mind like lead," van Eelde continued, steadying his voice. "It was just the ordinary tittle-tattle

between men who take an interest in a fascinating woman ; but what the man said was entirely new to me, and I assure you it was hard work not to show what I was feeling ! Hearing that you were staying with me, he asked me how you were and so forth. Of course he had no idea there was anything between Mrs. Delmaar and myself, or he would not have spoken as he did. He went on to say that it must have been with mixed feelings that she had heard of your successes in Celebes. I asked, quite casually, of course, what he meant ; whereupon both he and the third party who was present teased me for being so little in the know. Had I really never heard it was because of her that five years ago you had been obliged to ask to be removed from Batavia—that Delmaar, having discovered the relations between his wife and you, had put an end to it by insisting on your going away for good ? ”

Van Eelde paused and looked expectant, but Anton did not speak or move, so he went on :

“ You can easily understand how I felt ! The story seemed too circumstantial to be only gossip, and you remember telling me yesterday that your name had been coupled with hers. That remark came back to me and has given me no end of worry.”

Anton still sat silent, nor did he look at the speaker, who continued more energetically :

“ Thank the Lord, I am not suspicious by nature, but here, you must agree, is material enough to give any man in my position a frightful turn, to put him on the rack and keep him there till relief comes. That must be from the proper quarter, by informing me that the tale, though true to some extent, was a damned

lie in the essential point ; *you* have to rid me of a maddening uncertainty of which I am ashamed. But our friendship is surely not an empty phrase. It has its obligations, you must agree. All you have to do is to give me your word that there was never anything all the world might not know between you and Mrs. Delmaar—then we will close the subject. But, for God's sake, put an end to this torture ! If you say : ' No, there was nothing,' I shall believe you."

As he spoke, van Eelde's massive form was agitated by an emotion that the darkness, now almost complete, prevented Anton from reading on his features. Slow and lethargic as he was, even at this dramatic moment he indulged in no gesticulations ; but the table and the tray that was on it shook under his pressure.

During his appeal Anton was rapidly making up his mind. By the time Marie's new admirer had reached the climax of his pleading, the old one had come to the conclusion that under no possible pretext should the preposterous claim made on him be honoured ; and that, as far as he was concerned, Marie was safe against any inquiry held into their joint past.

If the only way to satisfy this inquisitive rival was by lying, then the lie had to be told. There was no alternative, he could not give Marie away. Apart from his pledge to her—never to divulge to anyone the intimate nature of their former relations—Anton's manly pride refused to accept the rôle assigned to him. At the idea that he should provide the man opposite with the evidence necessary to judge and condemn the

woman he had loved, he was seized with a feeling of revolt. Who was van Eelde that he should turn his back on her for what had passed between them, however short-lived it had been and whatever years had since elapsed? If it had been sin, they had sinned together. He would stand by her side, prepared to fight anyone, with whatever means circumstances should require, who dared to attack or blame her for what she and he had done by common consent. What, by Jove! was an episode to van Eelde that belonged exclusively to Marie and himself? True, it had ended in failure; but did that render it less inviolable, less sacred to the outside world? No one should be allowed to climb the wall that protected the holy spot, their lost paradise—no one be suffered to point at her for what she had given him! The mere suggestion was an insult.

Here Anton's jealousy took an uncommon, paradoxical form. He felt a perverse pleasure in imagining himself addressing van Eelde in words like these: "All right, you may have her, because it is my pleasure that you should. But—only as I left her! Even so she is miles too good for you! Don't expect me to acquiesce in your presumptuous attitude that you should have a right to know, or that she could ever be unfit to be your mate."

Having decided that the friend must be sacrificed to the old love, and the truth to interests of a still higher order, Anton felt as much relieved as if he were about to perform a meritorious act instead of one in itself ignoble. By nature honest and sincere, and even inclined to be over-scrupulous, he hated a lie as a vile

thing, a breach of the silent covenant between all decent people. Yet, in this instance, his resolve to say "no," where strictly and morally he ought to have said "yes," did not in the least alarm his conscience. He felt too deeply convinced that van Eelde had no right to put the question he had done, especially when a refusal to answer would be interpreted at once as a silent admission that Marie and he had been more than friends. But what made Anton especially impervious to self-reproach was the fact that it was only by boldly preventing the truth from coming out that he could pay off a debt to Marie, which he had only just realised he owed her. Her cruel words that he had forfeited her love by showing a lack of courage when it came to the point still rang in his ears. Could he let this opportunity pass of remedying his fault, of rehabilitating himself—though in his own eyes only—by making an heroic stand against any further disastrous consequences of his folly?

He had it in his power to destroy at a single stroke whatever dreams of happiness bound her and van Eelde to each other. He had only to tell this man the truth, at his own request, and never would he ask Marie to be his wife! For a moment the temptation to put a stop to their hateful adventure, to nip in the bud their hopes of success where he himself had failed, was overwhelming; till it lost its attraction by the thought that only by sacrificing Marie could he attain that issue.

Some deeper, manlier instinct led him than the mere desire to be frank and straight. Rather a liar than a hypocrite! How could he, the accomplice if not the

principal actor in the drama of five years ago, sit in judgment on the partner of his crime? How could he, with the same hand that had guided her to take what was not theirs, throw the weight of his evidence into the scales, so that *she* might be found guilty? No, no, and again no! Instead of allowing van Eelde to invade the domain of his most intimate affairs, he would severely shut him out. Instead of playing the rôle of informer, he would act as Marie's champion, her protector, though she would never hear what he had done for her.

Van Eelde had been for some time silent. Anton, aware that he could not, without prejudicing the cause he was about to fight for, let him wait for his answer any longer, resolved on a bold move that cost less than he anticipated. He felt strangely certain of himself, and showed no hesitation in producing his false coin—the only way after all of passing it as genuine.

He too rose to his feet. He now stood opposite van Eelde, almost touching him, and, placing his hands also on the table, faced him, while from his lips the words came easily :

"Of course you have a right to ask, though I am not so sure that I am bound to answer. But I have the lady in question to consider; you would take it for granted that something serious had indeed occurred, if I refused to discuss the point with you. As such is *not* the case, I may as well tell you so. You are right in believing Delmaar was mistaken. I behaved like a tool; I pressed her pretty hard, I made it almost impossib' for her to refuse——"

"But she did refuse!" van Eelde's voice came in a hushed whisper.

Anton bent his head in acquiescence.

"Enough! That is quite enough. That's all I want to know. Don't say another word!" van Eelde almost shouted in his excitement. "I am ashamed of ever having doubted her."

With a determined effort Anton managed to look him in the face. Their eyes met, but, in spite of the darkness, Marie's champion lowered his gaze.

"You loved her very much, I suppose?" van Eelde asked him, in a low, trembling voice.

"Very," said Anton gently. Then, stung by the idea of being pitied by his more fortunate rival, he added: "But I have lived it down long ago. Do I look like a rejected lover? She is no longer anything to me."

Van Eelde heaved a sigh of intense relief; then, as if to show it had nothing to do with the last statement, he exclaimed:

"You don't know the immense service you have done me! You would have been quite justified in refusing to reply—only, of course, as you said yourself—but no, not another word! But how can I ever thank you?"

To Anton's intense embarrassment he seized his hand and pressed it with effusion. Could he have seen its owner's soul he would have dropped it as if it had been a leper's. Such at least was Anton's feeling.

"Don't do that!" he said, trying to assume a light, natural tone. "It is nothing."

But his previous conviction, that the only way to

get out of the terrible dilemma was to lie, had suddenly and treacherously vanished. In vain he searched his brain for the arguments that had justified him to himself—they had vanished too. All that remained was a feeling of disgust with himself and with Life, a dim, sickening consciousness that for the sake of a love that stood condemned he had betrayed a friendship he no longer deserved.

CHAPTER XXIV

“YOU remember Scholten, of the National Bank?” van Eelde asked, appearing half an hour later in the doorway of Anton’s room.

Anton nodded. “What about him?” he said, busy with his collar.

“Would you mind our dining there to-night, instead of here? His wife is in Holland, and now and then as our meals are sent in from the same restaurant we join forces and feed together, either at his place or he comes to me. He rang me up just now, asking me for to-night, and to bring you too. He lives quite near—on the other side of the Plain. He’s a nice chap, uncommonly well read for a non-University man—that’s why I call him *mercator sapiens*. You know he has travelled a lot and is an expert in antiques. Wait till you see his old Portuguese chairs—they’re simply ripping! We shall get a glass of Bordeaux *di prima cartella*, for he is a connoisseur in that line too.”

“To tell you the truth——” Anton began, not at all enthusiastic about this sudden proposal, for in his present mood the prospect of coming into contact with people he only slightly knew did not in the least appeal to him.

"Just as you wish, of course," van Eelde said, visibly disappointed. "I accepted for us both because I thought you would like the change."

"Change from what?" lay on Anton's lips; for really they could not be accused of being too much together since his arrival. But he kept the remark to himself, saying instead: "After all—why not? I suppose it is quite an informal affair?"

"Quite," van Eelde hastened to assure him. "You go as you are—in white. He is most anxious to see you."

On second thoughts the idea struck Anton as being, after all, a good one. The prospect of a *tête-à-tête* meal with van Eelde was, under the circumstances, anything but tempting. Even if, as he suspected, the plan had been prearranged, in order to enable van Eelde to leave him directly after dinner and pay his intended call on Marie, there was nothing to be said against it, however painful the notion was of this so speedy meeting, and of van Eelde's intention to obtain her promise to marry him as soon as she was free. These things could not be altered. Only a miracle could prevent their happening, and miracles did not take place nowadays. "Let him have her!" Anton repeated to himself, trying to find some solace in the recollection that to-morrow, by this time, the whole affair would have receded to the background, and all his thoughts have automatically concentrated themselves on Europe, and what it had in store for him.

So to Scholten they went, on foot, as it would not take them more than ten minutes to get there. Hardly

had they passed through their own gate, however, when it began to appear very doubtful if they would reach their destination without being drenched to the skin.

"Who said there would be thunder?" van Eelde asked triumphantly, as from the distance they were greeted by a loud, prolonged rumble, while they strode on as fast as they could go under a threatening sky, now three-quarters covered with low-hanging clouds on the point of breaking.

"Did I contradict you?" Anton said curtly, vexed by the other's childish satisfaction at the fulfilment of his prophecy. In itself, the coming onslaught was not unwelcome. Anton felt as if the approaching cataclysm, which would put an end to an almost intolerable pressure, would also somehow clear his mind from the heavy cares that clouded it. Looking up to the leaden-coloured dome above his head, he could not help wishing that a deluge would come down, which would drown the whole rotten world, himself included!

Already the trees along the dusty roads creaked and moaned in futile protest against the squalls that, scout-like, commenced to harass them. Beneath the heavy crowns, at intervals savagely shaken, it was dark as Hell; but even the open beyond seemed little lighter, except for the faint, lingering crepuscule in the north, in which direction the two were hurrying. The street lamps, in single file, a string of diamonds far asunder, twinkled as brightly as usual, but their cold self-confidence was surely a pose in the face of coming things. Nor was the intervening silence, so weirdly contrasting with the mad gusts of wind that

broke it every now and then, in any way reassuring. On the contrary, it appeared ominous and threatening.

The prostrate earth seemed to hold its breath as a thrill of anguish ran through it—a sigh, an invocation : “ Let what is bound to come, come quickly ! Let it be over soon, for pity’s sake ! ”

The suspense was cruel, it became a torture, making the world look black and menacing, weighing on all that lived and breathed like lead.

“ That you ? You have been lucky ! ” Scholten exclaimed, as van Eelde and Anton reached his protecting veranda before the first drops began to fall. He stood on the steps looking out for them, having just given his *tukang kebon* (gardener) an enormous Chinese *pajong* (umbrella) of waxed paper, with which to go and meet them and pilot them safely into port.

Scholten and his guests shook hands and exchanged a few words of cordial greeting ; till at a flash of lightning they winced and stopped talking, as almost immediately a thunderclap followed that made the entire house quiver.

“ By Gad, that was close by ! ” van Eelde exclaimed.

“ There’s going to be an awful storm. It will come down in torrents. Let’s get inside,” Scholten warned them, setting the example.

“ Just a moment,” said Anton “ I want to have a look, if you don’t mind.”

A foolish anguish nailed him to the spot that offered such a splendid coign of vantage from whence to watch events as they came.

“ One would think you had never seen a tropical

thunderstorm before," laughed van Eelde, taking him by the arm to make him follow Scholten's lead.

But Anton gently freed himself from the constraining hand.

"It will be a long time before I see another," he said, by way of excuse.

"Do just as you please and join us when you have had enough of it," Scholten told him, preceding van Eelde into the deeper portion of the front gallery, where, on a marble table, surrounded by rocking-chairs, a silver tray packed with decanters and glasses shone invitingly.

Left to himself, Anton tried in vain to pierce the darkness that like a wide black cloak had closed behind them the moment they entered the lighted sphere of the house.

He had not long to wait, for another flash, still more blinding than the first, cleft the heavens from top to bottom, and, for the fraction of a second, filled the wide plain with a ghastly light. It was all the more intense for the short moment that it lasted. In a glance it showed Anton a scene familiar enough yet strange and seemingly novel. Distinct to the minutest details, though the picture was presented as a whole: the rows of trees behind, with here and there a low white house peeping through them; the bandstand in the foreground, empty of sound and deserted; the human figures and vehicles hastening as fast as they could along the road in front were all touched by the magic searchlight, till they shone for a second and then sank back into nothingness.

But, short-lived as it was, the vision deeply impressed

the lonely spectator. To him it was as if this switching on and off, this dissolving view of what was real and yet so ephemeral, had some sinister significance, some hidden meaning. To him there was good reason for the panic that had seized those hurrying to shelter, running fast, or urging their horses by whip and rein. To him the quiet, arcadian nature of the background only served to emphasise, nay, exaggerate the impending danger ; as if in another breath this peaceful spot would be visited by some awful calamity that would spring on it in the dark and reduce its well-regulated life to wild chaos and distress.

And yet, in his present mood, there was to Anton a comforting element in the lurid contrast. It frightened and attracted him at the same moment, as if he had been a little boy, afraid of the dark yet hypnotised by its horrors.

Involuntarily he drew a parallel between the fate hanging over the scene just shown, and wiped out again, and his own destiny. How bright it had seemed but a few hours ago, and now—darkness, pitch darkness around him.

" How much like Life and what Life stands for ! " he sadly mused. " What is there in this world to rely upon ? What, of all most dear to me, have I been allowed to keep ? Everything has gone to pieces. Love ?—a foolish dream ! Friendship ?—a thing I cannot live up to ! My career ?—bah ! what *lasting* results have those five years in the jungle brought me, or what attraction has van Loon's proposal now that the mere thought of returning here makes me shudder with pain and anguish ? "

He paused for a while. "You fool!" he went on, addressing himself and clenching his fists. Then, suddenly resigned to his fate: "Perhaps it is better so," he sighed. "Just a peep at the curious thing we call existence, one mouthful of the bitter-sweet drink we name our Life, and then—darkness again, oblivion, Nirvana! A few moments of intense interest, and imaginary bliss or woe—and the thing is over, we stop for ever!"

With a start he realised how near this was to becoming an adherent of the old Eastern creed he had so often derided, or, in the full daylight of his hope and fortitude, heartily detested—when his wandering fancies took another turn. Having once compared this crash and shock, this battle of the elements that was about to take place, with his own inner life, he was struck by the infinite beauty in them both—in this menace in the air and that which, for him, was already translated into fact. Was it, he asked himself, the element of danger, always present in his adventure with Marie, that had made her so inexpressibly dear to him? It flashed through his brain that Delmaar had never known, could never have been certain of the whole truth of their relations; for not for a moment could Anton believe that Marie had ever made a full confession. No, Delmaar had only guessed, or would he, with his sinister, resentful nature—a hater born—have let the offender off so relatively cheaply?

Long before the crisis came, leaving Anton no other choice than to accept the other's terms and vanish from Batavia, he was aware he was playing with fire; that the moment the husband *knew*, life or death would

be the issue to be fought out between them, nor would Delmaar be over-scrupulous in taking his revenge. Yet Marie had been absolutely wrong when she suggested that it was out of cowardice Anton had avoided him, or for that same reason had applied for another post when Delmaar, informed of the *Controleur's* visits to his house while he was away, insisted, through her medium, that her lover should disappear. Even now Anton felt he would have enjoyed a duel with this man, in battle royal for the woman they each so passionately wanted. But circumstances did not allow of it; latter-day society would never tolerate a bloody solution; instead of the heroine, Marie would have been the victim. The world would not have permitted them peacefully to savour a happiness bought at such a price—had Anton been fortunate enough to kill the husband.

Nevertheless, during the whole course of their intrigue, Marie as well as he had been conscious of threatening disaster looming heavily above them; even during the days they were most convinced they had a perfect right to look upon Delmaar as the impostor, the usurper, and upon themselves as created for each other.

Was it not this flash of lurid light, of possible doom, of failure in the end, that had lent their romance its greatest fascination? Was it not so much his objection to marrying a woman of whose moral equilibrium he was not positively sure, as the disappearance of the piquant element, that had helped to change his mind? What value had a thing got for the asking? And now his feelings had taken another turn. Now

Marie seemed more desirable than ever, because she had again become forbidden fruit! The moment a rival appeared on the scene she regained all her former fascination. A rival more formidable than even Delmaar—for was he not the chosen, the preferred one?

Without further warning or delay, the storm broke right above him. The rain began to fall, in full, heavy drop dotting the cemented steps with big, round spots that were quickly wiped out by the stream that followed. For a second there seemed to be separate descending rivers, till these mingled in one broad sheet that poured with a sonorous, continued sound, in which the clattering on the iron roof played a leading part and the hissing of the impact with the gravel path was only audible at intervals. A liquid wall fell before the house, isolating it from the outside world, reflecting its lights but opposing to their passage a glistening barrier.

To Anton it seemed as if that outside world had wholly vanished, so veiled in water were his immediate surroundings, so pressed on all sides, as if the weight of the attack were concentrated on this point alone. Only when another flash turned the inky night beyond into a strange, hazy picture, was he, from the shelter of the protecting roof under which he stood, enabled to realise that the fight was general, the advance universal; that for miles and miles around the flood was streaming down; that the dome of heaven had burst in numberless places. If, over a boundless area, from a tank of unmeasurable size, suspended somehow in mid-air, myriads of taps had been simultaneously

opened, this running, running, running of water everywhere, without a break, regardless of consequences, could not have been more ruthless, more imposing. But the intolerable suspense had passed; the terrible pressure on a soil dry and parched with thirst had given way entirely. The earth, ignoring its senseless terror of a short while ago, welcomed with open pores the flood, and drank with rapture; the dust, by the first falling drops, was beaten to submission.

Relaxation had set in: with the coolness that sank like manna from above the oppression that stifled all living things had lifted. However furious might be the splashing and rushing of a downpour that seemed determined on manifold destruction, a firm conviction was abroad that no real harm was being done.

From the soil came a humid smell giving a promise of new life, although suggestive of decay. The compound was swamped and turned into a lake, on which were bubbles, like rivet-heads on armour-plating. The road in front, made now and then visible by the vivid lightning, showed as a thoroughfare transformed into a canal.

On all sides water met water, like columns of victorious troops coming together in the market-place of a brow-beaten town. Flower pots everywhere were overflowing. Down pipes and gutters, roofs and roadway, rivers ran, seemingly mad, yet sure of their way.

Until the strain began to lessen, and nature woke to merriment over its own excesses. Other sounds began to interrupt the monotonous hiss of rain; prominent among them the chorus of frogs that in the

swollen ditches and newly-created pools started their clamorous song of thanksgiving, even before the sluices of heaven closed.

Meanwhile Anton had lost his interest in the scene ; the stage of impending ruin—however imaginary—over, its attraction ceased. Rain alone, however abundant, had no power of fascination.

" I shall see enough of that in Holland," he told himself, as he turned away and stepped inside to join the others.

In Scholten's spacious dining-hall, open at the back, where on either side a flight of steps led down into the compound, now a shallow sea, the three men had the large oval table to themselves. Under the glow of the electric light they seemed lost in the immensity of their surroundings ; while two enormous sideboards, standing out against the wide expanse of whitewashed walls, took little from the prevailing gauntness and bareness.

The atmospheric disturbance entering on its last stage—a steady downpour that seemed neither excessive nor willing to stop—still shut off the house from the world outside by enshrining it within a screen of falling moisture, and involuntarily affected the small group round the table, drawing its members closer together. During the last hour the temperature had sensibly fallen. An exhilarating coolness, which made the trio in their white duck shiver, set a seal of intimacy on their meeting, making a confidential chat a vital necessity. Curiously enough, it was Anton who rose to the occasion. The tonic supplied by the sudden change of atmosphere had saved him from himself ; and

when Scholten, half in earnest, half in jest, expressed his satisfaction at entertaining the "Hero of Bisapo" before he left for Europe, he was ready to respond to the appeal and do his best to make it a jovial evening. The flattering words revived his spirits and helped to put him on his legs again, reminding him that whatever Marie might think or whatever favour she might show van Eelde, there were many in the land who considered it an honour to shake him by the hand, and a still greater to hear from his own lips of his life in Celebes, and the secret of his administrative triumphs.

It was evidently just this at which Scholten was aiming—to make him talk of a part of India neither van Eelde nor he had ever seen, of experiences they had never gone through, of a school for character they had not attended.

Once having started answering questions, Anton's abundant recollections soon carried him away. His thoughts went back to Takalar, the life that seemed so far behind and yet was still so near—the years that had left such ineradicable impressions but had been rather monotonous than eventful, the time, above all, when he was free, released from this terrible passion that had taken hold of him again.

His subconsciousness was suddenly stirred by the delicious sensation that he was after all a rich man; that during a period of strenuous work and many, many worries and privations, he had amassed treasures of everlasting beauty, entirely his own, of which neither love nor friend could ever rob him.

From the moment the head-boy brought in the second course, until he left them with their coffee and

cigars, Anton did practically all the talking. Van Eelde's somewhat caustic interjections—as though to remind him he exaggerated, that his enthusiasm was overdone—soon ceased to hurt him, for the simple reason that he, too, was gradually converted into a sympathetic listener; while Scholten's interest was so keenly aroused that he almost neglected his dinner, which for him meant a great deal.

Anton moved them because his emotion was genuine, the idealistic note in his narrative as natural as it was sincere. He could not help assuming a somewhat solemn, declamatory tone—he knew it, but did not mind. He was uttering a plea, a vindication of the rights of the exile to be heard on matters of general interest, though he had spent years and years far from the centre of civilised life. He wanted to tell his listeners that what to them must have seemed a hardship was really a blessing, or in any case had turned out to be a blessing to *him*. He felt constrained to protest against their pity—as though these five years in the jungle must have been a trial scarcely to be borne. Encouraged by Scholten's rapt attention and roused by van Eelde's initial scepticism, he decided to give them both some slight idea of the advantages life in the interior, yourself the only European, afforded.

The solitude is hard to bear, he said, especially in the beginning, when you have not yet discovered what a noble comforter, what a skilful educator Nature is; how, without ever forcing on you her silent sympathy, she is always ready to clasp you to her mighty breast.

Anton had only to shut his eyes to see valleys and mountains, rivers and shores few Europeans had ever

visited, yet so familiar to himself, rise up before him. With a pang he realised that in all probability he would never visit them again—but was this feeling not the best proof of what they had been to him in his loneliness? though some time had elapsed before he surrendered to their charm, before he understood that these days of forced seclusion were not his enemies but his friends, and that the hour would come when he would long to have them back, and to live them through once more.

He described the glorious discovery he had made of how far his powers of endurance could be induced to go—much farther than he ever anticipated; how with small means and still scantier assistance he had achieved first a little, and then a little more; how to his surprise and growing delight he had learned that to-day's complete exhaustion was always followed by to-morrow's recovery; that while his responsibilities grew, his resources seemed to grow as well—until he felt thoroughly fit, ready for any emergency, and always on the alert, as if he had acquired some resiliency in body and mind that was absolutely to be relied upon. Still, there were many drawbacks, many difficulties, and chiefly his longing for congenial company, for a chat with an equal, a real friend. But these moments of depression became rarer and rarer; soon there was no time for them left. The machine was kept running at full pressure, and the days proved all too short. His work gave him plenty of variety; as he looked back it showed a curious mixture of mental and physical occupations and pastimes. He had to break in his own horses, as he could not trust

this important business to his servants ; and had now to act as surveyor, then as builder—to-day as magistrate, to-morrow as engineer. Points he had to decide included legal, financial, and political problems ; and a certain portion of the twenty-four hours was spent in getting about his large domain, on horseback, in his buggy, in a *prahu*,* on foot.

He liked Takalar and loved his daily task ; both made him forget he was miles and miles away from the nearest spot where other white men—and women !—lived, in conditions that, to him, often seemed most enviable.

" But there was one thing," he concluded, " I could never quite live down. A nasty feeling—call it childish if you will—that showed my satisfaction would never be absolute, that it was more nearly resignation than genuine content."

" And that was—— ? " Scholten queried.

" You will only laugh."

" You mean your not being married ? "

" Oh no," Anton exclaimed, almost fiercely, " I don't mean that at all. A childish, silly idea, I said. Would you bring love and marriage under that heading ? I was afraid that I might die there—far from the old country, from my own people. And it was not the fear of death itself. That, strong and healthy as I was, did not trouble me. It was the dread that if it should come by some unforeseen occurrence—there, where I died, I should have to be buried. Foolish, eh ? "

" You are like the Chinese ! " remarked van Eelde lightly.

* Native sailing-vess.

"That is so," said Scholten. "They can't stand the idea of being buried in foreign soil either. When I come to think of it, I shouldn't like it myself. But you van Weghe," he added, "will soon be able to expire in peace—at least for the time being, for when your leave is up you are of course coming back here?"

"He will have to!" said van Eelde. "But that reminds me—I must be off. No—I really must. I have a beastly lot to do that has to be done this evening. Good-bye!" And shaking hands with Scholten, and nodding to Anton, he was gone before they could protest any further.

"What a pity," said Scholten, adding, after a while, "Is he really so busy as all that?"

"I suppose so," Anton answered. Then, realising that the remark was too casual, he added, "Last night he did not go to bed till after one."

An hour later Anton also departed. Neither Scholten's stories of British India or Japan, where he had passed several years, nor his inexhaustible collection of photographs and curios, nor his gramophone, a beauty, nor his Bordeaux, a dream, could keep Anton longer than the merest politeness demanded. From the moment van Eelde so suddenly broke away from the party, a terrible restlessness had taken hold of him. In his thoughts he followed the other along the muddy roads, straight to the Big House in Tanah-Abang. In vain Scholten, who had seen him so eloquent while the evening was still young, tried to claim his attention for what *he* had to say. He probably attributed the guest's growing abstraction to a

feeling of indifference the moment he himself was no longer the hero of the conversation—but what did Anton care? He tried to excuse himself by saying that for several days he had had insufficient sleep, thus opening the door for a timely retreat.

On the stroke of ten he rose, and thanking Scholten profusely for his hospitality managed to get away, refusing the proffered carriage. For the rain had stopped, and he was not afraid of a little mud, he said; so, as Scholten was by this time tired of him too, they parted on the steps where they had first met that evening.

When alone, Anton realised how foolish his nervousness was and that he might as well have stayed with Scholten a little longer. The meeting between van Eelde and Marie he could do nothing to prevent. They had already met, of course—they were together at this moment. How could he step in between them, and what did he care?

The sky was perfectly clear, and a full moon looked down on the scene of the fierce warring of the elements of a short while before. Anton decided to go quietly home. He had not had a good night's rest for days—it was perfectly true. He would have it now, go to bed early.

Ten minutes later he was back in the pavilion. Here, in van Eelde's study, he found Annie's letter, readdressed by Beekveldt, from Macassar; and a fat one it was, meant as a great treat before he should leave Batavia. He turned it over in his hands, but did not open it. He put it in his pocket. Tomorrow, at this hour, he would be far away, and

having shaken off the effects of the terrible nightmare he had just gone through he would read it at his leisure, giving it the careful, loving attention it deserved ; but not now in the perturbed state he was in. No, it had travelled such distances to find him, it could wait a few more hours.

He took the *trommel*, a flat tin box filled with magazines and illustrated papers from the reading club, to the front gallery, and placed it on a table. Here, outside the room, it was nice and cool ; besides, the idea of sitting in van Eelde's study was repulsive. Wiping his forehead he sank into the nearest chair, and taking up the first magazine he came to tried to interest himself in its contents.

But it was impossible—either the letters danced before his eyes or the meaning of the sentences he was fortunate enough to master escaped him. He banged the book back into the box and took out a pile of illustrations, but the skimming of pictures, dealing with incidents in all parts of the world, failed to absorb his over-excited mind.

After a while he gave it up. He looked at the clock—it was a quarter to eleven. Much too early to go to bed. Besides, was there the slightest prospect of being able to get to sleep ? In Takalar he had often looked forward with childish rapture to the opportunities Batavia would offer of visiting one of those marvellous things, a cinema ; but it was too late for that now. A walk round the Plain ? Of all the idiotic ideas ! He could not keep on running round and round that blessed square until van Eelde chose to return. *Till van Eelde returned ?* He was not waiting for him,

surely! But it was quite time he was back. What in the world could he and Marie find to occupy them till so late in the evening?

His terrible fantasies haunted him again. He tried to drown them in a strong whisky and soda, but hardly was it swallowed than he sprang to his feet. Why not dispel all further doubts as to the innocence of the relations between those two by going straight to Tanah-Abang, and from a safe distance having a look at the house and what was going on there? Then he would go quietly to bed. It was the mystery of the unseen, the unexplored, that made one uncertain and nervous; to face things boldly was after all the only way.

A few minutes later and he was following Mastings' Walk, the narrow path that skirted the northern side of the pavilion. Arrived at the boundary, he found the gate closed, but seeing that only a wooden bolt secured it he pushed it back, and there he was free to walk straight to Marie's, to follow the lane that came out in Tanah-Abang, a few yards from the southern gate of Delmaar's compound. The ditch in front of the gate was no obstacle, as a broad, heavy plank lay across it. So, stepping over, and walking on a few hundred yards, Anton found himself on a level with the goal of his desires, now only separated from him by a stretch of garden and a bamboo fence.

The house stood out big and dark against the sky. The seven windows of the upper storey on the side he was on were hardly to be distinguished from the surrounding brickwork, but Anton's sharp eyes noticed a faint gleam piercing through two venetian blinds—the dining-room.

Another look told him the front gallery was still lit up, in other words that the inmates had not retired. The whole large space of ground in front was therefore brilliantly illuminated, so that Anton was thankful for the shelter of an intervening row of shrubs, otherwise he would have hesitated to risk himself in the exposed area.

Once in the road bordering the canal, he slowly advanced to the bridge where that same morning he had been brought to himself by the fierce noonday heat, after the interview that had so tried him. Surroundings, circumstances, and his own mood were now entirely different; it was as if it had all happened years ago; besides, he was not in a mood for recollections—the present hour completely absorbed his mind and senses.

To his intense disappointment, he was unable, even from his elevated position on the bridge, to see what was going on in the front gallery to which his eyes clung. The distance was too great, and the row of palms between the huge columns, which before he had not especially noticed, secured complete privacy to anyone behind them.

Around, night already reigned supreme and undisputed. Not a single living creature was abroad.

Then he heard a laugh—Marie's—and van Eelde's deep, low voice was just recognisable; he seemed to be telling her something that amused her very much, but these few faint tokens of life were all Anton could gather.

Suddenly the lights went out—only a broad ray from the boudoir still shone.

"They have gone inside," he said to himself, and almost at the same moment the sound of a piano—*her* piano—fell on the quiet air.

A few uncertain bars, and she was playing Spielmann's "Lied"—*his* piece—to the other man!

But he had no time to give adequate expression to his indignation. An incident of an entirely different nature forcibly drew his whole attention.

On the opposite bank of the canal, a motor car, its fiery eyes making Anton turn his head, slowly and silently approached the bridge where he was standing, and at a short distance suddenly stopped, while as suddenly its lamps went out.

The moon was hidden behind a cloud but there was a lamp-post on the bridge, and Anton, feeling how clearly he was exposed to possible curious onlookers, stepped down on the Delmaars' side. There, to his right, was a small stone building, formerly a watch-house for native sentries, now deserted, owing to the abolition of Batavia's primitive police.

He stepped in and stood stock still, listening to the footsteps on the bridge behind him—footsteps of shod feet of a European! They came nearer—then halted. At once, combining the appearance of that motor car with these unexpected sounds, Anton was seized with a mad foreboding of something dreadful about to happen.

Peeping out carefully from his shelter in the direction from which the steps had come, he held his breath; for there, as he had vaguely feared, stood Delmaar, in the full lamplight, staring at the same house that had just absorbed his own attention.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW lucky to have escaped detection by Delmaar in the very act of spying ! What other construction could be placed upon his presence, at this late hour, on a spot where even natives rarely passed ? For the Big House stood more or less apart, at a lonely point of Tanah-Abang.

The deserted guard-house offered an ideal hiding-place. No rain had entered ; its floor was dry and hard and smooth. Another moment and Delmaar would go by and so on home, with no inkling of what the small pile of brick and plaster held concealed from him.

There were four walls, enclosing an oblong of six feet one way, with a tiled, overhanging roof, and inside—nothing. Covered in the course of its many years with as many layers of whitewash, its doorless, narrow entrance faced the road on a line with the railings of the bridge that almost touched it. The peepholes to the right and left were small and narrow. The interior was pitch dark and rather evil-smelling.

In the rounded frame of the entrance, four or five feet above the ground, still hung the hollow log that for ages had served as a gong to give the alarm in case of fire or other trouble, but now rested immobile,

forgotten. To make it more secure, the solitary gas-lamp on the bridge, turned, no doubt in accordance with some thief-catching . . . of old, a dark side, like a shut eye, on the watchman's shelter.

A minute or two elapsed, bringing no change in the situation. Anton, to his amazement and growing annoyance, realised that his old enemy still lingered on the bridge, instead of passing by and up his own drive. At intervals the light, nervous fall of his footsteps came quite near, then died away again. "What the deuce is he waiting for?" Anton grumbled, greatly vexed at the delay. After such a journey as he had evidently accomplished, what made Delmaar approach his house so queerly, leaving his car on the other side of the canal?

Though safe from all fear of detection, to be thus kept a prisoner by one whom he hated and despised was gall and wormwood. Irritation at first overcame all Anton's other feelings. As time went on and Delmaar was still there, he said to himself: "It is too absurd!" and decided that to emerge and show himself was the only manly course to follow. Still, some deeper instinct kept him where he was. He would only expose himself to ridicule, while, with a little patience, he would be relieved from his unpleasant position. Delmaar could not stay where he was for ever.

Through the opening on his left Anton had a glimpse of the house, though he could no longer see it so well as from the bridge. The music that had so deeply wounded him as another proof of Marie's heartlessness had stopped; but now and then her laugh fell as a vivid crimson patch on the sombre garb of night, and seemed

to remain floating in an air, still and mystery-laden, that to him had again become heavy and oppressive.

Thus cruelly reminded of van Eelde's luck, Anton's thoughts involuntarily turned to the man who could put a stop to this horrid merriment, simply by appearing there before them.

"Why does the fool hesitate?" he scornfully asked himself again, but now in reproachful indignation.

Through the peephole on his right he suddenly caught sight of Delmaar, motionless, not more than three yards away. A poor creature he looked in his sun-helmet and soiled clothing, having driven all day through heat and rain and dust and mud to find his wife with another! The awfulness of his situation softened Anton's severe judgment: that he had only got what he deserved, and that, cruel and selfish as he was, on him pity would be wasted.

Delmaar's face Anton could not plainly see, but he seemed to be vociferating to himself, his gaze fixed on the house yonder.

What did it all mean? the hidden observer again wondered. But, instead of his anger growing, he became absorbed in the drama taking place before him; though there was yet no action, at least as far as he could see. What lay beneath this barely ruffled surface? Was it tragedy the hours would bring that moved so slowly, that hardly seemed to move at all?

But it was all nonsense, he protested. The nervous state he himself was in made him scent danger where none existed, and coming disaster in the most trivial thing. On second thoughts, Delmaar's reluctance to go home was easy to explain. He could not guess that

Marie's party consisted of a single person. His wife was obviously entertaining—what more natural than that a man of his unsocial, misanthropic disposition should prefer to wait till the guests had gone?

Meanwhile Delmaar's unexpected reappearance played marvellously into Anton's hands; it began to look as if the husband would avenge *his* wrongs on his quondam mistress and her new admirer. The moment the master of the house should enter, their alliance would come to an inglorious end—perhaps for ever, for there is nothing more fatal in a love affair, Anton reflected with morbid philosophy, than a stream of cold water turned on the newly-lighted fire.

Could anything be more grotesque? "The gods have a marvellous way of readjusting things!" Anton murmured to himself. Was it not as if some mysterious influence had occasioned Delmaar's sudden advent, just in time to nip Marie's latest intrigue in the bud?

The queerest part of the whole thing was, that now Delmaar and he had an all-important interest in common. Each had to prevent those other two joining forces at their expense.

Had Delmaar's return any reference to van Eelde? Had he somehow, while away, got wind of the growing intimacy with Marie and hurried home to put a stop to it? This, after all, was such a natural solution of the problem that Anton began to feel convinced it was the right one.

But why then did Delmaar not go to the house at once and eject van Eelde neck and crop? With a feeling of revolt Anton realised that the husband, with the calculating cruelty of a gloomy, embittered nature,

was biding his time in the hope of catching the culprits red-handed, that he was holding himself in until they should have irretrievably committed themselves. Shocked and startled, Anton felt he could not bear to picture Marie standing shamefaced or van Eelde caught in the toils—it reminded him too strongly of his own anguish years ago. He wished to spare them this supreme humiliation. A nerve-racking fright, a hard lesson, well and good—but not a punishment in flagrant disproportion to the wrong done! For, morally speaking, Delmaar would reap what he had sown.

Was it probable that they would play into his hands by going too far? Had not Marie that very morning said how much she regretted what she had done for himself, before she was free? True, it was late to be still laughing and chatting with her visitor; but that she should let herself be carried away by his passion, and so fall into the trap now laid for her, was quite another question, she so clever, so sure of herself, the accomplished manipulator of men and their desires.

But a fresh incident occurred that heightened Anton's already painfully strained interest: the shadow of some one passing fell right across the lighted threshold of his hiding-place. Then he heard whispering, close to the peephole where he stood; and though he could not make out what was said, plainly Malay* was being spoken. A native, barefoot, in the noiseless manner of his race, had joined Delmaar; soon Anton detected a corner of the head-handkerchief, and the next moment recognised Amat as the wearer!

* The *lingua franca* of the Dutch East Indies.

So close were they that it seemed as if Amat must see him, Anton, too ; till he remembered the sheltering darkness he stood in. Amat was sitting on his heels before his *Tuan*, apparently relating something and receiving instructions. Immobile as were his features, his jet-black eyes glittered as though they were inwardly on fire and would burst into flames presently.

However outwardly respectful the servant, and reserved the master, there was an intimacy, a grim meaning in their conversation that almost wiped out the disparity in their social status ; from their tone of hushed passion Anton felt that *one* feeling, *one* purpose guided them, and that it was dark and deadly. The fact that he himself had no more embittered enemies than just these two, that in the old days it was not their fault that he had not fallen by their hand, provided him in a flash with the key to the riddle—at last he saw what had brought them there, and against *whom* their conspiracy was directed. The Maos incident came back to his mind and the full truth was plain : it was to catch *him* Delmaar had rushed back from Semarang, to spring upon them, Marie and him together, as they were supposed to be at this moment ! Informed by Amat of the meeting at the station, Delmaar had decided on his destruction, should he find him in his house.

All was now as clear as daylight. Against van Eelde Delmaar cherished no ill-feeling ; he had probably not the faintest idea there was anything between him and his wife. In face of the coming divorce proceedings she had, of course, taken good care not to throw her case away by laying herself open to censure.

Into the late course of events this youngest theory fitted to perfection ; and threatening as the position was, Anton could not help seeing its humorous side. How droll the discovery that Delmaar and Amat—these two sinister figures, impelled by their common hatred of himself—had come on purpose, in the night, biding their time to strike him, and that it was not he at all who was with Marie !

Amat's stealthy reconnoitre had led him to the wrong conclusion. Perhaps he had heard the visitor had come by way of Masting's Walk ; that *Tuan Controleur* van Weghe was staying with *Tuan* van Eelde and had been there that morning. This would explain Delmaar's nods of approval as he listened to his confidant's report.

Their wonderful plan had ignominiously collapsed, or would collapse very soon. It was difficult to imagine a more ludicrous situation. Instead of himself, Anton sardonically reflected, Delmaar would find van Felde quietly sitting with his wife. " But suppose "—the sudden thought stung him,—" he does *not* find them in harmless talk ? "

Well, came the next reflection, there was still time to interfere. And again Anton pondered ; should he not emerge and, boldly crossing the bridge, pass Delmaar and his satellite in the full glare of the lamp, leaving no doubt of his identity ? How could they attack him ? He would give them no excuse. Yet he hesitated. An inner current rendered it impossible for him to follow a course that must be executed with pluck and dignity, with decision and a touch of irony to make it a success. The idea of looking Delmaar

in the face and telling him without words : " You have made a fool of yourself ! " was tempting, but it was impossible to carry out. For while Delmaar had never done him any wrong, but had, on the contrary, shown him every hospitality, he had wronged Delmaar deeply, more than the man was himself aware of. It required more cynicism than Anton felt he had at his command to fling contempt or to sneer at his victim ; in fact he loathed the idea of confronting him at all. This feeling, humiliating as it was, made him stay where he was, though he could not help trying to persuade himself that he had another good reason for doing so. Why should he, of all the people in the world, act as the guardian angel of those two yonder ? If they had agreed to become one, let them pay the penalty ! Marie's ideal—of a good old-fashioned duel fought for her possession—was too fine to be disturbed ! As an involuntary witness of the coming contest, he was only too glad to have the opportunity of seeing in how far van Eelde would stand the test in which Marie had so unkindly told him he himself had failed. Let this clever, witty man show *his* mettle in the hour of need ! That was only fair.

Another prudent look outside and Anton's eye was caught by an object Amat was evidently handing to his master, for a brown hand let go, as a white one took it. Quickly as it passed from one to the other, Anton had just time to see it was a Browning pistol. Amat's visit to the house was now explained ; he had not returned with empty hands.

So Delmaar had armed himself ! Suddenly the short pantomimic scene became a tragedy ; its crude realism

made Anton pause, however well prepared he was to see some "real fun." "My God," he muttered, "this looks serious!"

As if all preparations were now complete, Delmaar and Amat left the bridge and passed the guard-house, with quick, inaudible steps. Anton, peeping out, saw them cross the road and enter the compound by the same gate he had passed through that same day, when going to see Marie.

During the few minutes that he waited till he deemed it safe to forsake the protecting shadow of the little building, he made another discovery. At the Big House the front gallery was now completely dark—either the visitor had left or Marie and he had retired to one of the inner rooms.

Behind this simple fact loomed a world of possibilities. Anton, realising that this was the sign, however unintentionally given, that had caused Delmaar to give up lingering on the bridge, felt his heart stop beating. He even forgot his own morbid interest as to what had caused Marie to have the lights extinguished, in the haunting horror of what was, in consequence, about to happen.

He left his refuge, and, at a safe distance, followed Delmaar and his "boy." When he reached the drive they were quite near the house and had halted. He halted too, behind a bed of crotons, keeping his eye on them. The moon was now shining brightly, illuminating the large compound. He had to be careful he was not seen.

For a moment he made up his mind that van Eelde must have departed, and that, Marie having gone to

her room, the rest of the lights were, of course, switched off. But no, even had van Eelde taken the short cut by Mastings' Walk instead of round by the road, Delmaar, and most probably he himself, would have spotted him at once; for he was in white and could not reach the path without crossing an open space, when he would have been plainly visible in the moonlight.

He had not gone—he was still there; while the deep silence in which the entire house was wrapped made it evident that the two were not in the dining-hall either, having a parting drink, for instance. For in that case some light would show at the back, even if there were no sound of voices. There was but *one* explanation—Anton shuddered at the thought of it. He was seized by the awe of the inevitable, as before the thunderstorm an hour or two ago. But now the danger was *real*, not imaginary, now it was not rain but *blood* that was going to flow. *This* anguish had nothing humorous about it!

He could almost *see* van Eelde, lying in agony on the marble floor, shot by Delmaar's unfailing hand; and the dreadful vision did away with all sense of rivalry, with the mountain-flood of jealousy that had surged and raged in him. Forgotten was the ribald comment that van Eelde would only get what he deserved, that he had no one but himself to blame for the heavy bill presented and its bloody settlement—cash down! Forgotten too his malicious joy at the prospect of Marie's sorrow and undoing.

Not only compassion, kind feeling, justice made him tremble at what was coming—his conscience rose

in revolt against the sentence to be passed against those two. In a sudden fit of exasperation he fancied it was *he* had brought these murderers here—*he* who, to a large extent, was responsible for what was going to happen. For what had made Delmaar hurry home but the hope of settling his old account with himself, of finding *him tête-à-tête* with Marie? After the meeting at Maos, in the light of what had gone before, Delmaar's conclusions were quite natural. Nor was that all! For in the wake of this reflection came one still more agonising. If he had not lied to his friend that evening van Eelde would in all probability not be as he was now—caught in the trap laid for the older lover!

Ah, if he had but carried out his plan of leaving the guard-house while Delmaar and Amat were on the bridge! His sudden appearance would have confounded their suspicions; Delmaar would have gone home at once to find van Eelde sitting there, and all would have passed off quietly and well. But self-accusations were useless at such a moment. He must act, and quickly! What could he do to stop these bandits and warn the two inside? How save them? How?

Keeping his eye on Delmaar still lingering near the house, hidden by the bougainville tree that stood there, Anton searched his brain for a means of turning the course of Fate without unnecessarily exposing himself to danger. A telephone message would do, but from where else but the Harmonie could he send one? It would take him ten minutes to get there, and in the meantime— What if he stole back to the guard-house,

and created a diversion by beating the *tom-tom* that hung there with his Malacca cane, belabouring it as hard as he could? This unexpected alarm, if it failed to divert Delmaar's attention, would at least bring Marie and van Eelde to their senses, reminding them that they were not alone in the world. But the stirring revival of an abolished practice would attract a good many people, who would come flocking from all sides. And if all at the Big House remained silent, what explication could he offer?

Here Delmaar and Amat, giving up their waiting attitude, moved on; but instead of ascending the winding stairs to the upper floor, they disappeared from view behind the farther corner of the frontage.

Anton decided he would not follow them. If he turned that same corner he might come upon them suddenly—and a nice meeting that would be!

There was a better way to outwit the sinister couple and frustrate the aim they had in view. Now that they were safely hidden on one side of the house the other was open to himself. Instead of following them as closely as he dared, with the instinctive intention of rushing forward at the critical moment, and, if no better expedient presented itself, intervening, no matter the consequences, to prevent a worse calamity, he might now forestall them, if he acted promptly.

There seemed but one course open to achieve this end. From something van Eelde had said, about alterations at the Big House, Anton gathered that Marie's window must be on the side he was free to go. A stone thrown against it would cause her to look out, when he would give his message and hurry back, leaving

it to van Eelde to decamp as best he could. Later on he could invent some story to explain his own presence on the scene ; but this was merely a detail.

Thus the threatening drama might have a peaceful conclusion, might even at this hour turn into a farce. For if Delmaar, finding Marie alone, should say or do anything to betray himself, how, in answer to her cool questioning, would he be able to justify his own curious conduct of that night ?

CHAPTER XXVI

ANTON soon traversed the open square where the moonlight at any moment might betray him, and reached the shadier portion of the compound, where big trees shut the light almost entirely out and he felt relatively safe, though he still had to be careful.

Dimly visible in the deep shadow of the building, the big round apertures of the basement, seven in number, corresponding with the windows on the upper floor, seemed so many monstrous eyes, watching him more and more keenly, the closer he approached them. He could no longer advance as quickly as he wished and along a straight line, but had to grope his way among a profusion of flower pots, and ferns in tubs and tins, that hindered him not a little ; but for his stick he would have fallen several times, either through bumping up against unyielding objects or because of losing his foothold in the mud. At last he was able to scan the row of windows right above him, on the alert to catch the faintest sound that came his way. But all was dark and silent, as though the place were uninhabited.

Now his eye, grown more accustomed to the dimness, could distinguish the elaborate decoration that crowned

the base and see how it provided a kind of narrow ledge or balcony, below the line of windows, where pots with creeping plants sent out waves of dusky foliage, upwards and downwards.

He sought a stone, and having found one, took his aim. But the hand that held it sank powerless to his side when, to his amazement, he saw the half-blind of the very window at which he was staring slowly open, and the space filled by a human form that, carefully emerging, stood presently on the small ledge, revealing itself to the hidden observer as van Eelde. He seemed quite able to maintain his equilibrium, and closed the curved doors of the divided blind before he stirred; then, moving step by step towards the front, his back against the wall, he passed window by window until he reached a tree, close up, against the house. Next moment Anton saw him suspended from a branch, then drop to the ground, when he made off in the direction of the road. Another few seconds, and his form stood out clearly on the bridge; he was evidently going the long way round to his pavilion.

"Well done!" said Anton to himself, with a sigh of great relief. The bone of contention thus removed, what was there to fear? though he could not help sending a message after the departing figure: "You have just missed getting an ounce of lead in those clever brains, old chap! Let this be a lesson to you!"

He felt as one who, on the point of succeeding in a perilous, if not heroic, task—and in his case it was certainly unselfish—finds himself deprived of his

laurels, because the peril has vanished without waiting for him to fight it.

"Now I suppose I can go home," he muttered, somewhat sadly. "I was not needed here. I will go by Mastig's Walk and shall just be in before that foolish man, and ask him how he enjoyed the evening, and what was Marie's decision."

On the point of retracing his steps, in order to reach the southern entrance and from there the path leading directly to his temporary quarters, he heard a slight noise from the back, reminding him that he had to be careful still.

Crouching down between the flowers, he realised that he had taken this measure of precaution none too soon; some one, invisible until he crossed a streak of moonlight some twenty feet away, advanced with noiseless strides in his direction.

Anton crouched lower behind the nearest flower pot, and waited. The horror of the situation was that he could not hear a sound, nor could he look out without running the gravest risk of being seen. Some few moments elapsed that seemed an eternity—then there came a dull thud close by, as if the dreaded object of his curiosity had stumbled against a tin, and again silence. It was some time before he dared to move and send a careful glance around, when another friendly ray of moonlight showed him a native, disappearing in the direction of the path he, Anton, had just chosen to escape by.

It was Amat. In a flash Anton understood the danger was not yet over, and that it now centred entirely round himself. For what else did that whisper

of a few minutes ago from the back mean but that Delmaar was there, on the point of entering the house, and had sent Amat to cut off a possible retreat, in case the bullet to be discharged did not kill but only wound, and the victim should get away by Mastig's Walk?

Anton gave a short, defiant laugh. Where was the danger, after all? He had only boldly to follow in van Eelde's footsteps to reach the bridge and safety. He stood erect. "I am in no hurry, but it is getting late. I had better go at once, by the imperial way," he said to himself. Should he allow himself a cigarette, now that he was out of the wood? For it was only if Delmaar found him in the house that he would dare to shoot him like a dog, as, in the old days, his threat had been—and only if he risked himself on that dark, slippery path, instead of taking the high road, that Amat would venture to attack him. Forty or fifty paces along the house wall and as many more across the grass, and the laugh would be on his side.

He had already started, when from the inner portion of the silent pile towering above him the sound of voices made him halt. Hard, menacing words fell on the quiet air like the strokes of a hammer; then, in a higher key, came other accents, in swift succession—that was Marie who spoke!

Anton stood petrified. He saw the scene enacted: Delmaar, in a rage at finding his prey slipped through his fingers, and unable to bear his discomfiture, had attacked Marie with accusations only warranted in the case of his having found van Eelde there. But could that *menacing* tone be solely to vent his spite? And what did the "no, no—no!" mean that Marie

kept repeating, with all the force that was in her, if not a refusal to obey an order or comply with a demand, flung at her, as it were? Was Delmaar insisting on being told who had been there, and was she defying him, refusing to give the name? But no time was left Anton to discuss this point with himself, for, suddenly, a terrible shriek rent the air, a shout for help, from *her*!

It was like a trumpet-call. It thrilled him from top to toe. His blood curdled and boiled at the same time. How could he leave her like that and seek safety for himself while she was being insulted, no, ill-treated? Instinctively it dawned on him that to protect her was still *his* task. He had not rested in her arms to let this ruffian chastise her!

He had but his stick and fists to serve her cause, while Delmaar was armed. What did he care? He would have to enter the other man's house, where *he* least of all had the right to be. He scoffed at the idea of any such considerations keeping him away when a higher duty called him, for another shriek resounded—this time it was as if she were being strangled. What would such a man in his fury not be capable of doing?

Anton ran straight behind and through the open back gallery on the ground floor, with its short, thick columns. There was no one to be seen. Of all the many servants the Delmaars kept, not one seemed attracted by what was going on between the *Tuan* and the *Njonja*. No one barred his way, when by the yellow light of a single lamp he found the stairs leading to the upper story.

Three and four steps at a time he tore up them ; down the passage they led into ; across the huge dining-hall partly invaded by the moonlight ; and so straight to the wide space in the centre of the mansion.

Instinctively he had made no more noise than he could help, however overwhelming his desire to come to Marie's rescue ; for the more unexpected his arrival, the better his chance of knocking Delmaar down and disarming him before he could use his deadly weapon. Partly for this reason and partly in order to take breath, Anton did not at once rush forward. Taking in both hands the curtains that barred his further way, he slowly and carefully parted them in the middle.

At first he could not see—the stream of light from within dazzled his eyes. Then a glance convinced him he was only just in time, that his intervention was justified and urgent.

Here in the inner hall—a big square room, empty except for the rugs on the marble floor and a marble-topped table in the middle—a scene was being played that, vitally interested as he was, made his heart stop beating.

In front of one of the doors—two on either side leading to the bedrooms—Marie, on her knees, clung desperately to the handle ; while Delmaar, the pistol in his right hand, violently shook her with the left and every now and then kicked her, shouting : " Stand away and let me in, by God ! " and to some one on the other side : " Open, you cur, or I'll shoot her first, then you ! "

Marie's resistance was making him mad with fury.

Still, as he stamped and swore, his watch never faltered, nor was his weapon lowered ; he kept it pointed, ready for the more formidable adversary who at any moment might emerge and face him. For Delmaar, it was clear, was using Marie as a kind of hostage, so that her shrieks, provoked by his ill-usage, would force the man whom he supposed was there to fall on him—when a bullet would be his answer.

Immediate action on Anton's part was too imperative to allow him leisure to reflect on the strange irony of the situation : these two fighting, one to enter, the other to keep closed a room that when searched would be found empty ! He started to rush forward, then checked himself in time. He had no weapon of attack ; his stick he had left outside, for fear of betraying his presence by knocking it against a wall or the furniture. The revolver would be turned on him the moment Delmaar saw him. His only chance of escaping certain death was to fall on his adversary from the rear, to pinion him ; he had no fear of the outcome of a wrestling match, could he but seize him unawares. He thirsted for the struggle. He longed to batter with his fists that face inflamed with hate and rage—to twist the arm that dared to strike Marie, to trample on the brute who was beast enough to kick her ! Now was the moment to wipe out the slur of cowardice, of hesitation in the face of danger, she had thought fit to cast upon him. In front of her, before her eyes, he would show his mettle and win or fall in battle royal. The prize, herself, he did not want, but she should see.

Neither of the two had noticed him, though he was

not more than a dozen yards away. He cautiously advanced, determined, should Delmaar turn, to upset the table and dive beneath it before the latter fired.

Within a few feet of his opponent something occurred that changed the whole aspect of affairs—one of the rugs had got displaced, and Anton tripped up against it. He recovered himself, but his fate was sealed; Marie saw him, and her glance betrayed his presence to their common enemy. In a flash she recognised him as her champion and looked away again at once—too late, however! Quick as lightning Delmaar turned his head, not astonished, like Marie, at Anton's presence, but at once convinced that his prey had escaped and had now come back to attack him in treacherous fashion from behind. An "Ah!" of satisfaction escaped him, as he whipped round and covered the rival who had just, as he believed, dishonoured him.

Involuntarily Anton staggered back a pace or two. "No, no! For God's sake!—I was not here—I was just passing and heard your wife cry for help——" he panted.

To meet death thus, helpless, unable to strike a blow in his defence or hers, and for a deed he had not done, at least not *now*—his very soul revolted. He would not—he could not.

Delmaar had only a contemptuous smile for an excuse manifestly so poor. With an evil sneer he indulged in the pleasure of seeing his betrayer at his mercy, silently begging for the life he was entitled to take from him. Then, deadly pale, but not without dignity, he slowly said:

"Did you spare *me*? There——!"

A flash, a short, sharp report, a woman's scream, and Anton reeled and fell. It was as if a red-hot, barbed shaft pierced him, dragging him downwards. The arms he had raised in futile appeal were stretched in agony; his fingers spread in a vain attempt to clutch at something; his tall, strong form came crashing down like a young oak to which the axe is laid; his head struck the floor with a sickening thud.

The impact crushed out whatever feeling there was left in him. A sensation of sinking, sinking into a bottomless abyss, silenced too the terrified wonder why he had to go—why it should be *him*.

Yet for a while he recovered consciousness—for a short, short while. A moment came when he crept back to that strange mortal thing that was himself—at least so it seemed; though it was another Anton van Weghe than he who had rushed to his doom to save Marie.

How long he was away he never knew, nor did he inquire in the state of semi-coma he was reduced to; but he was curiously aware that he had only returned for a short time and without any purpose whatever.

He vaguely recognised Marie, who bent over him, forgetting her fears, though still sobbing in her joy that now she would be able to save him. Through the mist that hung in and over him, the beloved features, ineffaceably printed on his soul, seemed the reflection of Life itself; and he faintly smiled at them, as if to say: "I have no grudge against you for having made me believe in you!"

To Marie that smile said something very different. It told her he was free from pain, and to her childish

conception of Death this alone was enough to make her think he had come back for good.

"Thank God!" she sobbed, from the bottom of her heart, and she had to control herself not to cast her arms about him and kiss those eyes that could laugh again.

"No, you must not speak," she whispered, "really you must not"—as though he had insisted on doing so. "But of course," she went on, after a little pause, "you want to know everything. He" (meaning Delmaar) "has gone, and Dr. Wieleman will be here directly. I have sent for ice"—here she burst into tears. "I can't help crying, darling, when I look at you, but you must take no notice. It is *joy* now. I will save you, I *will*!"

She told him how she and her old maid, Isah, had propped him up as he lay, with cushions; how Isah had warned her of Delmaar's return at the last minute, when van Eelde and she had been foolish, very foolish, she agreed. Instead of boldly facing the intruder, they had turned the lights out, so that under cover of the night the late visitor might slip away. Then, seeing the house was watched, they had lost their heads, and it was at her suggestion that van Eelde had gone into a room where it seemed unlikely that Delmaar would seek him if he found his wife quietly reading in the boudoir.

She went into no more details, except that she assured the silent figure that she did not love van Eelde and had not promised him anything.

"He was just wishing me good night when Isah came and told us about Henri. That made me say: 'If

Henri finds you here I can give up all hope of my divorce.' I was very angry with van Eelde, and told him I never wanted to set eyes on him again! I did not ask him to come here, and now——" here she burst into tears again.

To all this Anton lay quietly listening, apparently in obedience to her strict orders not to speak. But in reality not a word of what she was relating reached the moribund man—for him neither Delmaar's name nor van Eelde's had any meaning whatever. Marie's tears left him indifferent; the character of her relations to his old chum did not concern him any more.

Naturally enough, Marie misinterpreted the vague stare of the half-closed eyes. To her it could have but one meaning—the sad recollection of the way in which he had been treated by herself. Kneeling by his side she laid her hand softly against his own.

"You have *won*, Tony, you have won," she said, in her sweetest voice, "and I am immensely proud of you, *immensely*, do you hear? There is only one man I have ever loved and that is *you*. You will be better soon, and then——"

She did not complete the sentence, but, resting her head on the pillow, she looked up at him.

On his lips indeed came another smile, but it was not in reply to her belated message of love and happiness. Even had her words reached him, no vision of earthly bliss had power to rouse him; in these few minutes left him he had been spinning his own thoughts, if thoughts they could be called. What remained of his former self was concentrated on Marie—but it was the Marie of his dreams! That which had been the

spiritual side of their relations seemed to have survived the wreck of all the rest, and, claiming the last moments of his existence, made him see things his physical eye could no longer discern.

Nor did he any longer covet the woman that was in her. To him all that lay between their few hours of supreme delight and now had vanished. In this same night all misunderstanding and self-torture, all petty quarrelling and gruesome doubt, all passion had sunk away, taking with them the idea of sin and leaving nothing but a glorious, overwhelming feeling, that once upon a time their eyes had met and understood and that this moment had come back, unsoiled by the wrong they once committed.

He made a movement, and his whole being seemed on fire, causing him pain that at any other moment would have made him scream with anguish. But now he was in ecstasy. Nor did the dim consciousness that his right arm was paralysed strike him as abnormal. He suddenly knew what he had come back for.

With a supreme effort he raised himself on his other elbow.

"Oh, Marie!" he tried to say, but could not bring out the words. It was odd, but he did not mind this either; speech seemed so entirely superfluous between them.

His lips moved, seemed to shape themselves into a kiss. Eagerly she bent towards him. Her lips were quite near his own—when suddenly a convulsion shook him, his eyes started from their sockets, and he fell backwards on the pillow.

This time he did not return. He had gone—for ever.

Marie was right when she said that he had won. But at what a cost and for what a cause! Here victory was swallowed up in Death, not Death in victory.

THE END

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